Understanding and Evaluating Large-Scale Consular Emergency Response

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Understanding and Evaluating Large-Scale Consular Emergency Response

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Declaration of authorship:
Except where otherwise indicated,
this thesis is my own work

Karen Tindall, January 2012
This dissertation is dedicated to my mother
This dissertation consists of the following journal articles:

**Article I.**


**Article II.**


**Article III.**


**Article IV.**


**Article V.**

Tindall, K. and P. 't Hart. 2011. 'Evaluating Government Performance during Consular Emergencies: Toward an Analytical Framework', *Policy and Society*, 30, 2, 137-49. Both authors formulated the aims of the article. Karen Tindall collected the empirical data. Both authors conducted the analysis and designed the framework.
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Abstract

With increasingly mobile societies and greater global interconnectedness, international travel has become cheaper and more streamlined. The number of individuals travelling across increasingly permeable borders continues to grow. Large-scale consular emergencies occur when a large number of foreign nationals are under threat or in distress following a natural disaster, terrorist attack, or escalation of unrest abroad. Presented in a ‘thesis by publication’ format, this dissertation examines how governments, and in particular foreign ministries, respond to incidents abroad affecting a large number of foreign nationals; the strategic and operational challenges they face in implementing these responses; and how the ‘consular’ nature of this class of emergency that spans the domestic and international arena, shapes these challenges and response patterns. Drawing on data from Australia, Sweden and the United Kingdom, this dissertation examines the role and performance of foreign ministries during responses to three major incidents abroad: the 2002 Bali bombings, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2006 evacuations from Lebanon.

This dissertation sought to understand and evaluate government policies and practices with respect to large-scale consular emergency response, and draw attention to the foreign component of the typically domestic crisis management function of government. In the international environment of large-scale responses, governments have to work and contend with numerous actors. The scale of the emergency necessitates that bureaucracies engage in coordinated whole-of-government responses. Responses spanning both the domestic and international arena require coordinated action between foreign ministry headquarters and personnel abroad, and require cooperation with actors not normally involved in domestic emergencies. Managing distance in large-scale consular emergency responses encompasses more than physical and logistical distance. The challenge of assisting citizens whose emotions may be
affected by the foreignness of the environment, or by feelings of connectedness despite the physical distance, necessitates a response that incorporates both pragmatism and compassion. Governments mounting large-scale responses also have to contend with the expectations of the citizenry, which often go beyond what governments are capable of delivering outside their national territories. Deconstructing large-scale consular emergency response into constituent challenges provides a framework in which to assess the responses. Large-scale consular emergencies test the limits of bureaucratic reach, highlight the relationship between the citizen and the state, and engage the political sphere with questions of how far a government should go to assist citizens.
# List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFP</td>
<td>Australian Federal Police</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>COCON</td>
<td>EU Consular Cooperation Working Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFAT</td>
<td>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>DVI</td>
<td>Disaster Victim Identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>ERT</td>
<td>Emergency Response Team, Australia</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDETF</td>
<td>Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAO</td>
<td>National Audit Office, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBE</td>
<td>Order of the British Empire</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAF</td>
<td>Royal Air Force, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>RDT</td>
<td>Rapid Deployment Team, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMS</td>
<td>Short Messaging Service (text message)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOU</td>
<td>Statens Offentliga Utredningar (Swedish Government Official Reports)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRT</td>
<td>Swedish Response Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UD</td>
<td>Utrikesdepartementet, Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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Responding to Large-Scale Consular Emergencies

1. Introduction

Large-scale consular emergencies occur when a large number of foreign nationals are under threat or in distress while abroad. These emergencies typically result from a natural disaster, the aftermath of a terrorist attack, or escalating violence and civil unrest. With increasingly mobile societies and greater global interconnectedness, international travel has become cheaper and more streamlined. The number of individuals travelling across increasingly permeable borders continues to grow. For instance, in the eight years between 2002 and 2010 the number of Australian residents departing Australia more than doubled from 3.4 to 7.6 million (DFAT 2003, p. 136; DFAT 2011, p. 151). With more citizens outside their respective national territories at any one time there is greater pressure on foreign ministries when citizens find themselves in need of assistance.¹ This pressure is not simply due to gross numbers, but increased numbers of foreign nationals gathered in major cities and popular holiday destinations. In the event of a major natural disaster or terrorist attack, or when there is the threat of war or civil unrest, foreign nationals may not be in a position to get out of harm’s way without assistance.

¹ Consular assistance is not strictly limited to citizens. It may also be provided to other categories of nationals, for example, 'British nationals' include British citizens, but also 'British Overseas Territories Citizens', 'British Overseas Citizens', and 'British Protected Persons'. Depending on government policy, consular assistance may also be provided to permanent residents or a citizen's spouse and children. In the context of this dissertation, the term citizen will be used in a civic sense to include nationals or residents eligible for consular assistance from the government. However, the term does not include foreign nationals that are eligible for assistance through reciprocal consular agreements between states (see further page 10 of this dissertation).
These foreign disasters can be approached from a humanitarian aid perspective, from strategic security and foreign policy perspectives, and from diplomatic and political perspectives. However, limited academic analysis has been conducted on the consular facet of these large-scale disasters abroad. When the demand for consular assistance goes beyond the routine incidents or everyday activity managed by embassies, consulates and consular services sections, governments engage in large-scale consular emergency management. The subject of this dissertation is ‘large-scale consular emergency response’ – a phenomenon that raises questions regarding the relationship between citizens and the state, and the ability of governments to respond en-masse to citizens in need abroad. The dissertation examines the responses of three foreign ministries (Australia, Sweden and the United Kingdom) during three large-scale events: the 2002 Bali bombings, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2006 evacuations from Lebanon.

The provision of consular assistance to nationals while they are outside national territory is one of the many functions of a foreign ministry. Governments treat this function as ‘the combined result of the responsibilities that come with statehood and the moral rights that are inferred by their nationals’ citizenship’ (Melissen 2011, p. 4). Typically, consular assistance engages individuals or small groups that have found themselves in difficulty abroad, for example, when citizens are arrested, or need assistance with lost or stolen passports, hospitalisation or repatriation of remains. Assistance is generally received from consular officials at the nearest embassy, high commission or consulate, or from the consular services section located at the foreign ministry headquarters.

Amidst societal changes in the way people travel, foreign ministries have also faced ‘diminishing resources, internal bureaucratic reorganisations, expanding policy tasks, a revolution in communications and information technology and, not least, the expectations generated by transnational civil society

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1 Regarding terminology, an embassy is a ‘diplomatic mission’ or ‘post’ normally located in the capital city abroad. A consulate or consulate-general is a usually a satellite post located in a foreign city of strategic importance (i.e. for economic interests or in a tourist or expatriate area). A high commission is an embassy of a commonwealth country located in another commonwealth country. The ‘head of mission’ is known as the ambassador, high commissioner, consul or consul-general.
organisations and the business community' (Hocking and Spence 2002, p. 5).

Improved communication technology can spread news of a disaster around the globe within minutes. These improvements have the potential to facilitate a more rapid foreign ministry response to the disaster. However, additional pressure is also created from family and news media that also receive the news rapidly and consequently expect a rapid response. The result for foreign ministries has been that 'the challenges facing consular departments grow at a faster pace than the (financial) resources to address citizens’ demands' (Okano-Heijmans 2011, p. 24). A central tension within the concept of ‘large-scale consular emergency response’ is that governments cannot afford nor aim to take an extensive and all-inclusive consular rescue approach. Therefore, foreign ministry information campaigns highlight the responsibility of individuals to ensure that they have travel insurance, act responsibly, and know the limits of consular assistance so they do not rely on their government while abroad. When a disaster strikes however, it is difficult for politicians and the bureaucracy to adhere to this message as they risk appearing unsympathetic to the plight of their constituents and citizens in distress abroad.

In this class of emergency there are elements that mirror domestic emergency response (governments assisting nationals in, for example, a natural disaster). With this comes the pressure evident in most traditionally domestic emergencies. There are expectations that governments should work to alleviate the suffering of citizens. However, large-scale consular emergency response occurs in a foreign environment without the emergency management resources available within the national territory. A central focus in the scholarly study of public sector crisis management is how governments prevent, prepare for, respond to, and support recovery from major shocks and emergencies that affect public life. The primary focus has been on crises that directly impact the national territory, with increasing attention given to ‘transboundary’ crisis management (see for example, Linnerooth-Bayer, Löfstedt and Sjöstedt 2001).

¹ For a discussion of changes in the Australian foreign ministry more specifically, see Harris (1999); for the UK foreign ministry, see Allen (1999) and Allen (2002); and for the Swedish foreign ministry, see Ekengren and Sundelius (2002).

² There is ongoing discussion and debate regarding the definitions and interpretation of the overlapping terms ‘disaster’, ‘emergency’ or ‘crisis’, which also vary in usage between academic disciplines (see especially Quarantelli 1998; Perry and Quarantelli 2005). Although it is acknowledged that there are semantic nuances between the terms, in this dissertation the terms are used largely synonymously.
Boin and Rhinard 2008; Boin 2009a; Boin 2009b; Hermann and Dayton 2009; Roe 2009; Ansell, Boin and Keller 2010). Despite the disaster occurring outside national territory, large-scale consular emergency response is encompassed within public sector crisis management, as it is a national government response to citizens in need of assistance.

Large-scale consular emergency management is part of governments’ domestic crisis management function as it is a ‘domestic’ emergency in the sense that the targets of assistance are national citizens (those abroad, but also their concerned friends and family at home). The response is in part carried out within the national territory (for example, at the foreign ministry headquarters in Canberra, London or Stockholm). However, because the citizens in need of assistance are located outside the national territory, the response is also conducted abroad (for example, through the embassy network and by response teams sent to the disaster or conflict zone). Foreign ministries organise and conduct multiple operations from various points across the globe. Because part of the response operation is conducted abroad, responders have to navigate issues of sovereignty and citizenship and manage additional logistical issues of distance. Furthermore, with multiple countries responding to their own citizens in need of assistance – their own consular emergencies – the disaster or conflict is not simply a foreign event but an international one. There are a greater number of actors with their own agendas that may run parallel or contrary to that of the responding government. Within large-scale consular emergency response there are many elements not present or prominent in traditional domestic crisis management, and conversely elements of domestic crisis management that are less prominent in consular emergency response.

The aim of this dissertation was to understand and evaluate large-scale consular emergency response and to establish how governments, and in particular foreign ministries, respond to incidents abroad affecting a large number of foreign nationals. The objective was to ascertain strategic and operational challenges faced by governments when implementing large-scale consular emergency responses. Further to this, the intention was to understand the concept of ‘consular’ within this context, and determine how the ‘consular’ nature of this class of emergency (one that spans the domestic and international arena) shapes response challenges and response patterns. Little scholarly attention has been afforded to consular assistance, let alone consular emergency management (see further Tindall, forthcoming) and ‘a great deal
more has been written about diplomacy and diplomats than about consular affairs and consuls' (Melissen 2011, p. 3). Thus, a primary goal for this dissertation was to explore new ground and shed light on the challenges faced by governments engaging in large-scale consular emergency response.

Previous large-scale consular emergencies that have threatened the lives and safety of nationals abroad have illustrated how foreign disasters can garner a great deal of national media attention. Large-scale consular emergencies are infrequent events, but they have potential to be high-impact within government. These emergencies can rapidly escalate up the foreign ministry and broader government agenda, and they can influence the popularity of a political leader and the reputation of government departments. They can result in major scrutiny, formal investigations and inquiries. Regardless of a disaster's location, its domestic fallout can affect politicians worldwide, particularly if their constituents feel that the government should have done more to assist their compatriots. The 2010 brief for the incoming Australian foreign minister warned in relation to consular services, that 'growing case complexity reflects increased community and government expectations of the services to be provided'. Furthermore, 'demands on our crisis management systems continue to grow as expectations of whole-of-government responses to international crises and natural disasters increase' and 'demand for our services is now pushing strongly against our capacity limits' (DFAT 2010, pp. 149-50). A greater understanding of large-scale consular emergency response is of benefit to both scholars and practitioners of public administration and crisis management.

This dissertation on large-scale consular emergency response is presented in a 'thesis by publication' format. Five articles published, accepted or under review in international peer-reviewed journals make up the foundation of this dissertation. Together they address the overall research aim and research question. This introductory exegesis chapter first establishes the research question (section 2), and grounds the concept of large-scale consular emergency response in the field of public administration and public sector crisis management (section 3). The research design and the use of case study methodology are then explained (section 4), and the results and contributions of the five articles are summarised (section 5). In the concluding exegesis chapter that follows the five journal articles, the research findings are discussed and brought together to address the overall research question and form a greater narrative about large-scale consular emergency response.
2. Research aims and scope

The overall aim of this study was to understand and evaluate government policies and practices with respect to large-scale consular emergencies. Drawing on data from three countries, the study examines in particular the role and performance of foreign ministries during their responses to major incidents involving significant groups of their own citizens that have been victimised, threatened and/or trapped by events abroad. This subject, though by now a major concern for foreign policy makers, diplomats and foreign ministries, has received little attention from the research community. This dissertation presents the first major consolidated cross-national examination of large-scale consular emergency response. Reflecting the foundational goal of the dissertation, the overall research question was:

*How do governments respond to large-scale consular emergencies and how can these responses be understood and evaluated?*

Given the broad and multifaceted nature of the overall research question, it was necessary to refine the question into practicable components. This resulted in two central research questions for the dissertation: one addressing the 'response' component and one addressing the 'consular' component. The first central research question of the study was:

*How do governments and in particular foreign ministries respond to incidents abroad affecting a large number of foreign nationals, and what strategic and operational challenges do they face in implementing these responses?*

When the traditional crisis management function of governments in relation to citizens is extended to disasters outside national territory, this affects governments' ability to respond. To understand the expansion of the domestic crisis management function into the international arena, the second central research question was:

*How does the 'consular' nature of this class of emergency (spanning the domestic and international arena) shape these challenges and response patterns?*

These research questions lend themselves to many possible research strategies. As little research has been done on large-scale consular emergency response, I have undertaken an explorative study. The study focused on understanding the
constituent elements of a large-scale consular incident and understanding the acute response phase of the emergency.

To understand how foreign ministries have responded to previous consular emergencies and why the consular and large-scale characteristics of the disaster affect the response, three constituent aims were developed. Firstly, to determine what is already known about the management of large-scale consular emergency responses. Secondly, to understand which factors and actors impact these responses. Finally, to ‘move beyond description and analysis and begin elaborating on the difficult questions of evaluating crisis management’ (Rosenthal, Charles, ‘t Hart, Kouzmin and Jarman 1989, p. 472) and thereby establish an assessment framework to not only systematically describe but also evaluate consular emergency responses.

From these aims, five sub-questions emerged, each of which is covered principally in one of the five journal articles that form the analytical and empirical foundation of this dissertation.

(i) First of all, what is the state of the research on large-scale consular emergency response?

(ii) Given that they are often designated the ‘lead agency’ in consular response operations, how do foreign ministries perform the coordination work that this role presupposes and how do the inter-organisational relationships that are developed in this process shape the nature of those operations?

(iii) Given that consular response is predicated on citizens being outside national borders, how do the circumstances of distance, remoteness, and internationalisation affect the responses to consular emergencies?

(iv) How do citizens, media and policymakers (in particular foreign ministry officials) conceptualise the role of government in this area?

(v) How can we meaningfully evaluate government performance in consular emergency management?

Scope and demarcations

An emergency can often be delineated into phases, for instance, preparedness, response, and recovery. The central focus in this study of large-scale consular emergency response was the acute response phase of the emergency (see
The overall government response to the emergency may continue long after the immediate danger has passed and the whole-of-government response has been stood down. Evacuated citizens may require reception at airports and onward transport domestically, and long-term support may be provided to victims and families. However, this can be thought of as part of the broader response and recovery effort and not the acute response phase. These tasks become more akin to the day-to-day operations of consular services. Pre-emergency preparedness and planning, and post-emergency recovery, learning, and accountability processes were outside the scope of this project.

This study has been designed and conducted using a public sector crisis management perspective. Other academic fields have also studied consular work and disasters affecting foreign nationals from different perspectives. For instance, the impact on post-disaster international arrivals in disaster-struck countries has been considered in the field of tourism (see for instance, Beirman 2003; Glaeser 2003; Ichinosawa, 2006; Wilks, Pendergast, and Leggat, 2006; Laws, Prideaux, and Chon 2007). Outside mass events, the death and injury of individual foreign nationals and travel insurance claims have been studied within the field of tourism and medicine (see for example, Prociv 1995; MacPherson, Guérillot, Streiner, Ahmed, Gushulak and Pardy 2000; Leggat and Leggat 2002; Leggat, Griffiths, Leggat 2005; Guse, Cortés, Hargarten and Hennes 2007; MacPherson, Gushulak, and Sandhu 2007). The pre-emergency phase of consular emergencies has also been discussed in literature on foreign ministry travel advisories (see for example, Freedman 2006; Löwenheim, 2007; Maley 2011; see also FCO 2004). However, given that the study of the acute response phase and the public sector crisis management perspective taken in the dissertation, these approaches to consular work and disasters affecting foreign nationals were outside the scope of the study.

An objective of this study was to understand how governments and in particular foreign ministries manage the strategic and operational challenges and implement the responses. As the response is scaled up, it becomes a whole-of-government issue and moves up the political agenda. Additional

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5 Within this dissertation, 'government' refers to national government, primarily the bureaucratic or administrative function of government (public service or civil service). Although the bureaucracy is designed to be apolitical, national politics and the involvement of high-level political decision makers can also affect the consular response.
actors and agencies play important roles in the response that spans both the domestic and international arena. High-level decision makers and personnel from the prime minister's office and other key agencies, such as police, defence, immigration, and social services, contribute to the government's consular response. Local government and authorities also play an important role in the overall government consular response, particularly in the reception, onward transport and care for evacuees once they have been repatriated. However, for practical reasons the scope was limited to the national level of government. The foreign ministry as the most pivotal national government department in consular emergency response was taken as a unit of analysis in this study.

The foreign ministry is tasked with providing day-to-day consular assistance and is predominantly designated to be the 'lead agency' during large-scale consular emergency responses. This study focused on actors with a significant consular assistance role within the foreign ministry and consular policies and practices of the foreign ministry. These included personnel from the consular services section and embassies, and foreign ministry officials deployed to the disaster or conflict zones as part of a response team. If a disaster abroad is triggered by a terrorist attack or foreign conflict, the foreign ministry and intelligence agencies may also be responding to the security and foreign relations implications of the disaster. If a disaster triggers a humanitarian emergency, governments' foreign aid agencies may also mount a response to the disaster. While these government responses can at times overlap, the scope here was limited to the consular facet of the government response to a disaster abroad.\footnote{Many non-government actors also play a part in the consular response during a terrorist attack, natural disaster or war. Private industries, such as airlines, travel agencies and insurance agencies, work with governments and separately to assist clients and customers. Governments may also contract out part of the response to specialist private businesses such as the disaster management company, Kenyon International Emergency Services. On the ground in the disaster zone, NGOs such as the Red Cross and private citizens may also work with governments or separately to assist foreign nationals. The news media, reporting on the consular response (or apparent lack thereof), also plays a significant role in large-scale consular emergencies. While these non-governmental actors have been acknowledged as part of the overall consular response, they are not included in the central focus of the dissertation.}
3. Key terms and analytical context

Consular assistance

The foreign ministry is the central government department that manages issues of diplomacy, foreign policy and security. Consular services is one among many of the tasks of the foreign ministry and includes the provision of consular assistance. The task of large-scale consular emergency response sits within the broader task of consular assistance. Providing consular assistance is the responsibility of the state, as per the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, and the practices of consular assistance have evolved over time in response to changing traveller needs. Consular assistance primarily involves a range of routine day-to-day tasks. These tasks may include administrative assistance such as replacing travel documents, or cases of individuals that have been injured, killed, or imprisoned while abroad (see further the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, in particular Article 5 ‘consular functions’). Nonetheless, even the largest foreign ministries with the most extensive embassy networks will not have full coverage of the world. To expand reach, reciprocal consular agreements and memorandums of understanding exist between states. Citizens of one state can receive assistance from another state’s embassy if their state does not have representation in that country. European Union citizens, for example, can rely upon EU member states’ embassies when travelling outside the European Union. While these agreements are intended for general consular assistance and not for large-scale incidents, a history of cooperation between states on consular matters can facilitate cooperation during a large-scale contingency.

In some states such as Sweden, consular assistance has a legislative basis, while in other states such as the UK it is a standing part of government policy, and one that remains generally bipartisan. In the case of individuals in need of assistance abroad, governments generally provide clear guidelines as to what assistance the foreign ministry can and cannot provide to citizens abroad. For example, in all three countries studied here, consular personnel can help the citizen make contact with family and can issue emergency passports, but do not pay for citizens to be repatriated. If an emergency loan is provided, the

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7 For example, Australia has a Consular Sharing Agreement with Canada. Australians can access consular services at 20 Canadian diplomatic missions and Canadians can access consular services at 14 Australian diplomatic missions (DFAT 2011, 247-48).
citizen is obliged to pay it back, usually through travel insurance. However, these policies may not be strictly adhered to when a large number of citizens are affected and when citizens are unable to readily extricate themselves from the situation.

**Public sector crisis management**

This study takes a public sector crisis management perspective on large-scale consular response operations. Public sector crisis management, however, is not a defined or distinct academic field. Crisis management studies are often cross disciplinary and are conducted by an assortment of ‘specialist academics that are scattered over many disciplines – for example, disaster sociology, public administration, political science and international relations, political and organizational psychology, as well as technical specialties such as epidemiology and information technology’ (Boin 2004, p. 167). A crisis is defined by Rosenthal, Charles and ‘t Hart (1989, p. 10) as ‘a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system which – under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances – necessitates making critical decisions’. This definition essentially distils a crisis (and an ‘emergency’ in the context of this dissertation) to a situation of perceived threat, urgency and uncertainty. Accordingly, public sector crisis management is understood here to be the crisis management function that governments assume within society in times of threat, urgency and uncertainty.

Threat during consular emergencies can encompass existing and/or predicted threats to health, or to safety and security. Boin, ‘t Hart, Stern and Sundelius (2005, p. 2) argue that ‘crises occur when core values or life-sustaining systems of a community come under threat’. In large-scale consular emergencies the basic threat to ‘crucial norms and values’ is the threat to ‘physical and mental well-being of citizens’ more so than to ‘the rule of law or prosperity’ (Rosenthal and Kouzmin 1997, p. 283). According to Rosenthal and Kouzmin (1997, p. 283) ‘the origins of threats can be either endogenous or exogenous to the system affected’. In large-scale consular emergencies the origins of threat are largely exogenous. However, in some respects the severity of the crisis depends on the effectiveness of the response structures in place prior to the disaster, i.e. there are endogenous elements.

Boin et al. (2005, p. 3) describe urgency as ‘time compression’ and this is considered ‘a defining element of crisis’ in which there is a perception that ‘the
threat is here, it is real, and it must be dealt with as soon as possible’. The urgency during large-scale consular emergencies, for example in a terrorist attack or natural disaster, is born from the sudden impact of the disaster and the threat of imminent or further harm. In a zone of escalating conflict, the urgency relates to the threat of being unable to leave if the danger increases. The uncertainty in large-scale consular emergencies ‘pertains both to the nature and the potential consequences of the threat’ (Boin et al. 2005, p. 3). For instance, there may be uncertainty regarding the severity of the situation on the ground in the disaster zone abroad, and uncertainty regarding the number of citizens affected, the types of injuries sustained, and the location of missing citizens. There may also be uncertainty regarding future threat and how severe the situation will become (i.e. threat of further attacks, repeat or knock-on natural phenomena, or an escalation of violence).

To understand the challenges present in the acute phase of consular emergency responses, the study utilised the Boin et al. (2005) crisis management framework as an organising perspective. The framework identifies five key public leadership tasks: sense making, decision making and coordination, meaning making, termination and accountability, and learning. However, because the focus of this dissertation was on the acute phase of the response and did not encompass the much longer and more diffuse recovery period, only the first three of these tasks (sense making, decision making and coordination, and meaning making) were used to compartmentalise and understand the response phase. The acute response phase was understood to begin with the trigger that resulted in the foreign ministry mounting a response. This moment is relatively easy to identify if the emergency is triggered suddenly by a terrorist attack or a natural disaster. However, it may be harder to determine in cases such as the escalation of civil unrest. The acute response phase was understood to cease when the majority of citizens no longer required urgent assistance, or once citizens had been repatriated.

Large-scale

The scale of consular emergencies can vary greatly. There are no ‘objective’ criteria to determine whether a response is large-scale and warrants a scaled up whole-of-government response, or if the consular services section and embassy should be able to handle the response with minimal input from other government agencies. The consular assistance function of the foreign ministry
and embassy network has the capacity to handle thousands of individual consular cases each year. These cases, primarily managed through routine structures and procedures, can also include emergencies encountered by groups of citizens in need of assistance in very localised incidents, for example following a bus or plane crash. Within the consular service section and embassies, it may be easy to identify when a consular emergency has commenced. For example, as the head of Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade explained, it is not difficult ‘to work out when the consular crisis centre has to be activated ... That is an administrative decision for us; it is not a policy decision’ (Richardson 2011). However, the precise scale of the emergency is harder to determine.

The scale of the emergency may affect foreign ministries in one of two ways. A large-scale disaster may not affect a very large number of a particular country’s nationals. However, the response is made more difficult by the scale of the disaster, especially as large-scale disasters attract a great deal of media attention and the involvement of many other actors. This may result in a larger number of individuals back home contacting the foreign ministry concerned for friends and family that they believe to be in the disaster zone. The overall situation therefore requires a larger response. Alternatively, a large-scale response may be mounted when a large number of citizens are believed to be directly affected by the disaster, and this resulting demand on consular services exceeds normal capacity to handle consular cases. ‘Large-scale’ is defined here as exceeding or overwhelming normal consular assistance routines and resources of the foreign ministry.

The event cases chosen as part of the research design (see section 4 of this chapter) varied in their nature and impact and they varied in scale - both the scale of the disaster as a whole and the respective number of nationals affected. For example, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami left more than 500 Swedish citizens deceased; whereas a much smaller number of Australians (twenty-six) were killed. Yet, the physical destruction caused by the 2002 Bali bombings was far more localised than the tsunami, but killed 88 Australians. However, this more localised event can still be considered a large-scale consular emergency due to the context and environment, even for Sweden, which lost five citizens. The Swedish response had to be conducted amidst the uncertainty, urgency and threat of the aftermath of a terrorist attack that
killed more than 200 individuals altogether, including more than 150 foreign nationals, and injured many more.

**Consular emergency response**

A consular response operation may include locating injured citizens in hospitals, accounting for the missing, providing advice and offering general consular assistance. Consular assistance may include facilitating communication between citizens abroad and family at home, issuing of emergency passports and assisting citizens to leave the area via commercial flights or transport. However, if commercial transport is no longer a viable option, governments may arrange evacuation transport such as aeromedical evacuation, chartering aircraft, or chartering ships if flying is not possible. Some citizens may simply be seeking information or reassurance, where others may be seeking medical attention, evacuation, or repatriation of remains. In general, consular operations are coordinated from the foreign ministry headquarters and include the relevant posts abroad. To reinforce the response, foreign ministry personnel and other relevant government personnel are also likely to be sent from nearby diplomatic missions or from the headquarters to the disaster zone or surrounding areas.

Large-scale consular incidents exhibit urgency, threat and uncertainty, but they are not one-off or unexpected events. While it is not possible to know precisely where, when, or how the next consular disaster will occur, there are generic tools and procedures that can be used to assist citizens regardless of the cause or the geographical location of the disaster. With each successive event, large-scale consular emergency preparedness and response have commanded increased attention within the foreign ministry and broader government. Foreign ministries have refined plans and procedures to improve their response to larger emergencies. Within the consular service section, there has been development of and investment in infrastructure and general preparedness. Additional resources have been allocated to consular crisis groups and provided to train personnel in consular assistance and for large-scale responses.

Large-scale consular emergencies constitute a class of emergency within the realm of public sector crisis management. In an emergency located within the territory of the state, the concern is not just for citizens but also for the damaged or threatened infrastructure and the effect on the economy. The goal
of domestic emergency response is to bring society back to normalcy, both by removing citizens from harm and by reducing the hazard. A humanitarian aid response or foreign diplomacy effort may be initiated following a disaster abroad. However, in relation to national citizens, the primary focus of the consular emergency response is to alleviate citizens' suffering and remove citizens from harm's way. While every consular emergency differs from the last, the priority in each is to provide assistance to nationals.

4. Research design and method

Various methodological approaches are possible when attempting to understand and evaluate large-scale consular emergency response. As little research and analysis had been previously conducted on large-scale consular emergencies as a class of contingency, methodologically, this has translated into a preference for a case study design. Case studies have 'a natural advantage in research of an exploratory nature' (Gerring 2007, p. 39) and are preferable when it is not possible to conduct an experiment or alter the behaviour of participants (Yin 2003). A case study approach was utilised to examine the response of three foreign ministries (Australia, Sweden and the UK) during three large-scale events (the 2002 Bali bombings, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2006 evacuations from Lebanon).

A large-N quantitative study could have offered statistical analysis broadly describing government responses. However, this approach would have overlooked the context in which the response occurs, and would not have been able to address the second central research question (regarding how the consular nature of the emergency shapes the challenges). Yin (2003) advocates the use of case studies when the objective is to answer a 'how' and 'why' question. George and Bennett (2005, p. 25) likewise argue that case studies are 'stronger at assessing whether and how a variable mattered to the outcome than assessing how much it mattered'. The objective of this study was to investigate large-scale consular emergency response as 'a single phenomenon, instance, or example' (Gerring 2004, p. 342). It was thereby important to understand the context of these complex phenomena and contemporary events (Yin 2003, pp. 5 and 7; Flyvberg 2006, p. 236).

A multiple case study approach (Yin 2003, pp. 46-47; Stake 2006), also known as collective case studies (Stake 1995, pp. 3-6), was utilised, in which 'a number of cases [were] studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon,
population, or general condition' (Stake 2005, p. 445). Nine data points (three foreign ministries in three events) do not make the findings empirically generalisable to other consular emergency responses, and this project does not claim that 'findings are applicable to such populations except in contingent ways' (George and Bennett 2005, pp. 30-31). However, 'analytic generalisations' (in which 'theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study') were inferred from the data as a way to understand government policies and practices (Yin 2003, pp. 31-33).

A multiple case study approach allowed for examination of the context and environment in which the emergency responses were conducted. In terms of 'analytic generalisations', a single case study of one large-scale disaster, for example the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, would have resulted in findings that would explain more about that particular disaster than large-scale consular emergency response. Similarly if the focus of the study was solely on the Australian foreign ministry, then the study would tell us more about Australia's ability to respond to large-scale consular emergencies than about large-scale consular emergency response. The nine cases were not used in a strictly comparative case study design, as this would have risked not taking into account pivotal contextual and institutional differences between the countries and events. Moreover, strict comparisons were problematic because cases were not independent of one another. Foreign ministries were influenced by their experience of having responded to previous consular emergencies, and within a disaster there were instances of interaction between the three foreign ministries. In the interim between major emergencies there was also interaction between foreign ministries regarding consular strategy and best practices, in particular between Australia and the UK as part of the consular colloque and between the UK and Sweden as EU member states.

Case selection

There were two units of analysis in this project: the incident or event (the situation) and the foreign ministry (the actor). Three incidents and three foreign ministries were selected as case studies creating a three-by-three design. The foreign ministry responses as well as the context in which the response took place were analysed. The three-by-three multiple case study
Consular emergencies can be triggered by natural disasters, political uprisings and instability, or terrorist attacks (in particular terrorist attacks that are thought to be targeting foreign nationals). Major disasters located in developed countries that have an advanced crisis management function can still affect foreign nationals, for example, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 2005 London bombings, or Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. However, the consular emergencies that have often been most challenging to manage are in less developed countries that do not have the same level of resources, and where foreign nationals have less capacity to act without assistance. The selection of which disasters to study was limited to events that exceeded the routine responses of foreign ministries.

The benefit of studying foreign ministries during crises are that crises 'present the advantage of exposing organisations to extreme situations and consequently of bringing to light organisational phenomena that are more difficult to identify in normal situations' (Roux-Dufort 2007, p. 106). Large-scale emergencies were studied because the study of extreme or atypical events can reveal underlying issues present in the foreign ministry policies and practices. Patton (2002, p. 234) argues that a way to expose 'implicit assumptions and norms on which everyday life is based is to create disturbances that deviate greatly from the norm'. He argues that 'in many instances, more can be learned from intensively studying exemplary (information-rich) cases than can be learned from statistical depictions of what the average case is like' (Patton 2002, p. 23). According to Flyvberg (2006, pp. 229-30), 'atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied' and 'maximize the utility of information from small samples and single cases'. Flyvberg (2006, p. 229) argues that 'when the objective is to achieve the greatest possible amount of information on a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy'. Accordingly, the cases were selected using purposeful sampling. Patton (2002, p. 230) argues that 'the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth'. Ultimately, three consular emergencies were singled out for in-depth study: the 2002 Bali

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8 In the first journal article, however, the three events were utilised as a way to hone in on the literature search, but the search was not limited specifically to the three foreign ministries.
nightclub bombings (a terrorist attack), the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (a natural disaster) and the 2006 war in Lebanon (an escalating conflict).

On 12 October 2002, at approximately 11:00 pm local time, three bombs exploded on the island of Bali, Indonesia. The attack, orchestrated by terrorist organisation Jemaah Islamiyah, killed 202 including more than 150 foreign nationals. Many more were injured. On 26 December 2004, an earthquake struck in the Indian Ocean, 250 km of the coast of Indonesia. The displaced water resulted in a wave that reached 15 metres in height and travelled at up to 60km/h when it reached the surrounding land masses. The worst hit areas were the coasts of northern Indonesia and Thailand. The Indian Ocean tsunami killed more than 200,000 individuals. More than 2,000 deceased and thousands of the injured were foreign nationals from more than 40 countries around the world (Telford and Cosgrave 2006, p. 46). On 12 July 2006 there was resurgence in the conflict between Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Israeli military, which lasted until mid-August and saw the evacuation of thousands of foreign and dual-nationals.

The foreign ministries selected for in-depth study were limited to developed countries with an advanced government crisis management and consular services function. Case selection was not based on 'success' or 'failure', or 'most likely' versus 'least likely'. Without an already established and nuanced understanding of large-scale consular response, it was deemed inappropriate to categorise a response as a whole and select on that basis. The three governments selected were Australia, Sweden and the UK and their respective foreign ministries: the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Utrikesdepartementet in Swedish (UD). All three governments responded to consular emergencies triggered by the three events. However, in each event the three foreign ministries faced different challenges of distance and numbers involved. All three governments faced significant numbers of citizens in need of assistance in Lebanon. The UK evacuated approximately 4600 foreign nationals, Australia evacuated more than 5000 foreign nationals, and Sweden evacuated more than 8,000 foreign nationals (FCO 2007, p. 20; DFAT 2007, p. 9; MFA Sweden 2006, p. 10). When the tsunami wave struck, it was estimated that there were approximately 15,000 Australians in the affected region at the time, 26 of which were killed (DFAT 2005, p. 151), there were an estimated 20,000 Swedes
in the region with more than 500 deceased (MFA Sweden 2005), and an estimated 10,000 British nationals were in the region with more than 150 deceased (NAO and the Zito Trust 2006, p. 3). The 2002 Bali bombings left 88 Australian nationals, more than 20 British nationals and five Swedish nationals deceased.⁹

**Empirical material and interviews**

The empirical material used in the case study approach was sourced from semi-structured interviews, parliamentary inquiries and questions, policy documents, plans, annual reports, internal evaluations and inquiries, government and external reports, departmental websites, and observations of the consular section workspace in 2010. Academic literature was used in Article I to identify underlying themes and gaps. Academic literature was also used as sources for empirical studies, for knowledge and sources of information. Documents were useful in providing ‘background information prior to designing the research project’, ‘prior to conducting interviews’, and when corroborating interview data (Yanow 2007, p. 411). Print news media and news wires contemporaneous to the event were also collected. This material was not primarily used as ‘event evidence’ but ‘read for a sense of the times – of how people responded at that time to particular events or ideas’ (Yanow 2007, p. 411). It was particularly useful to get a sense of how the news media was covering the event. From a very general perspective, following initial news reports of an incident, the news media tended to shift attention from the broad event to the human-interest stories of nationals in distress, to the government response, and then to passing judgment on the quality of the response.

A methodological limitation regarding the data in the multiple case study design was that it was not possible to obtain the same quantity or quality of data and sources for each of the nine cases. When there was more data available for particularly information-rich cases (for example, Australia’s Bali response, or Sweden’s tsunami response) interviews were useful to augment cases that were less information-rich. Interviews were useful in providing context and clarification on documentation. One of the potential problems with using interviews in case study research is the risk of inaccurate memories and the risk that interviewees may confuse their own memories with

⁹ Specific figures vary between sources, particularly depending on how dual-nationals are classified.
information received from other sources. This is particularly problematic for events further in the past, such as the 2002 Bali bombings, which occurred nearly eight years prior to the interviews. The study of documentation prior to interviews allowed for clarifications with the interviewees when one source contradicted another. Triangulation between different interviews and between interviews and documents, redundancy of data gathering, and using confirmatory data across data sources helped to mitigate this potential problem (Stake 2006, p. 35).

Interviewees were able to offer insights based on their experience of working with consular assistance for a number of years (Richards 1996, p. 200). The practical knowledge of the interviewees was particularly useful in understanding the consular responses (Flyvberg 2006). Interviewees were also able to provide clarifications and interpretations of policy documentation and event evaluations that they had helped to prepare, and provide access to documentation not readily available. Interviewees were selected because they played a key role in the emergency response or in consular policy relating to crisis management. All the interviews were conducted by the author, and were conducted at the foreign ministry headquarters in Canberra, London and Stockholm and in embassies in Japan and Jordan.

Of the nineteen foreign ministry officials interviewed, nine were from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, six were from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and four were from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The duration of the interviews was between 40 minutes and 90 minutes, and fifteen of the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Five of the interviewees had experience as head of mission or deputy head of mission during one of the emergencies, seven had experience in an embassy or on-the-ground during at least one of the emergencies, and seven had experience responding to at least one of the three event cases from the foreign ministry headquarters. Three participated in the Bali bombings response, five participated in the tsunami response, and nine participated in the evacuations from Lebanon. Four interviewees had participated in the response to more than one of the three event cases studied. The roles of the individuals included: heads of the consular services sections, heads of consular policy, heads of the consular crisis groups, heads and deputy heads of missions, team leaders for deployed response teams, and members of the consular service sections. Although all had experience with other smaller consular emergency
responses, six of the interviewees had not participated in the responses to the three event cases. These six were in a consular policy or consular crisis management role in 2010 when the interviews were conducted.

Three of the interviews were conducted via telephone. As Stephens (2007) and Holt (2010, p. 114) attest, telephone interviews can be useful for professionals separated by geography, and the use of this method was necessary in this study, as foreign ministry officials are often posted throughout the world. While telephone interviews are thought to produce briefer answers and less engagement than in-person interviews (see Gillham 2000, pp. 85-87), this potential problem was actively mitigated. Information was provided to the interviewees ahead of the interview and precautions were taken to research telephone interview protocol and strategies prior to the interviews (Carr and Worth 2001; Novick 2008). The telephone interviews were of comparable length (approximate duration 40min, 60min, and 70min) to the face-to-face interviews (approximate duration between 40min and 90min). In line with observations made by Harvey (2011, p. 436) little difference was noticed in the length of responses to questions or apparent depth of consideration of answers. In agreement with Holt (2010) and Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) these interviews seemed to produce data of comparable quality to the face-to-face interviews.

Because the objective was to augment understanding of specific topics within consular emergency response, a semi-structured interview method was used. According to Morris (2009, p. 211), a semi-structured interview approach is applicable when 'looking for meaning'. As the aim was to 'gain further understanding of the terms being used or the perspective being articulated' (Yanow 2007, p. 410), from an interpretive perspective, semi-structured interviews were also a valuable method for understanding large-scale consular emergencies as a phenomenon and the challenges of responding. Questions were designed ahead of the interviews and were designed to facilitate understanding of the acute response phase tasks identified by Boin et al. (2005). The questions were specific to each person given their background and area of involvement. However, interviewees were able to expand on topics they believed to be noteworthy. For the interviews with individuals who were working with consular emergency response in 2010, questions also followed the Boin et al. (2005) framework. However, interviewees were asked about foreign ministry capabilities to engage each of these tasks, understandings of these
tasks, policies and protocols in place, changes that had been made in recent years, and future priorities.

Data analysis and categorisation

Using a multiple case approach allowed for the identification of common problems with, for example distance, but could also take into account the specific response challenges that varied depending on factors such as whether the event was spread over several countries, caused by an ongoing war, or outside the strategic area of interest of a state. It was possible to explore the differences and similarities between cases to gain a greater understanding of the challenges present in consular emergency responses and how these challenges were shaped by the nature of the emergency. For the analysis, the empirical material collected through document analysis and semi-structured interviews on each of the nine cases was subjected to a 'qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort' that took 'a volume of qualitative material and attempt[ed] to identify core consistencies and meanings' (Patton 2002, p. 453). Meaning was derived from the data through the use of conceptual categories or themes. The case studies were largely inductive, which involved 'discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data' (Patton 2002, p. 453). Nonetheless, the theoretical perspectives that influenced the research design were drawn from the field of public sector crisis management. This shaped the focus, parameters, and questions asked of the material, and provided the conceptual framework for the study (see Miles and Huberman 1994, pp. 18-21; Maxwell 2005, pp. 33-63), for example, coordination in crisis management or expectations in public administration.

First, the mass of empirical data was considered in relation to the organising framework of the Boin et al. (2005) tasks. The original framework consists of five tasks, but in light of the temporal demarcation to the acute phase, only the first three were utilised (sense making, decision making and coordination, and meaning making). This organising perspective was used to categorise the data, facilitate comparability, and produce multiple and systematic access points into each of the case studies. This qualitative data on large-scale consular emergency response was then categorised into meaningful categories based on the five sub-questions (see section 2 in this chapter). The construction of categories, which is thought to be 'especially useful in policy research' (Yanow 2007, p. 413), facilitated understanding of the internal processes at work within
the complex dynamics and network of a large-scale consular emergency response.

When seeking to understand the state of the research on large-scale consular emergency response (sub-question i), categorisation was used to establish three dominant underlying themes in the literature (see Article I). When examining how inter-organisational relationships shaped coordination processes (sub-question ii), the empirical material was surveyed for key coordination relationships and categorised based on key actors. Categories were then reduced to focus on governmental coordination relationships (see Article II). Categorisation in the third sub-question (the effect of the circumstances of distance, remoteness and internationalisation on the response) was used to produce different perspectives on the idea of distance (see Article III). This journal article was based on a wide reading of the available literature and empirical material. Identifying the ‘core consistencies and meanings’ resulted in the two broad concepts or categories of ‘distance’ and ‘displacement’. With the objective of understanding how citizens, media and policymakers (in particular, foreign ministry officials) conceptualised the role of government in this area (sub-question iv), the crisis management literature on expectations was used to interpret the interview material and understand the experience of consular responders (see Article IV). When asking how we can meaningfully evaluate government performance in consular emergency management (sub-question v), categorisation was used to develop and illustrate the evaluative framework of six key tasks and thirteen key indicators (see Article V).

A class of emergency

Generalisations cannot be made to a population beyond the cases under study, ‘except in contingent ways’ (George and Bennett 2005, pp. 30-31). The intention of this study was not to produce generalisations that were ‘context free’ as this approach has ‘little that is useful to say about human behaviour’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 62). Lack of generalisability is considered a common criticism of case study methodology. However, Flyvberg (2006, pp. 225-26) argued that this depends on how the case is chosen and stresses the importance of context-dependent knowledge that comes from case studies. Comparisons and common themes can draw out logical predictions. Donmoyer (2000, pp. 62-3) argues that ‘from the schema theory view of generalisability, the purpose of research is simply to expand the range of interpretations
available to the research consumer'. The objective here was to establish a base by which future research could test these context-dependent generalisations and provide avenues for future research (George and Bennett 2005, p. 111), for instance, by taking what has been learned about consular emergencies in these studies, and examining their applicability to other foreign ministries and other emergencies. These large-scale events should not be thought of as a 'unique historical event[s]', but should be 'considered as one of the class of events' (George and Bennett 2005, p. 114, quoting Verba 1967, pp. 113-14). These case studies were used to identify and explore 'a subtype of undertakings and phenomena that occur repeatedly throughout history, which can be grouped together and studied as a class or subclass of similar events' (George and Bennett 2005, p. 113).

Within this study of a class of emergency, event cases differed significantly in their trigger (terrorist attack, civil unrest, and natural disaster). The event cases studied included one predominantly localised to a couple of streets (Bali bombings), another mostly focused on one city (Beirut during the evacuations from Lebanon) and a third spread across several countries’ coastlines (the tsunami). The findings were also specific to Australia, Sweden and the UK, which vary for instance in terms of whether consular action has a policy and legislative base, whether they are a European Union member state (the UK and Sweden), or participate in the five-country consular colloque (Australia and the UK). The three foreign ministries studied have neither the largest nor the smallest embassy network.10 It cannot be said how responses would differ to smaller countries that have fewer travellers but also less resources, and to what extent they would rely on larger neighbours (for example New Zealand with Australia, and Iceland with the Nordic countries). The United States and France have larger embassy networks than the UK, but may also exhibit different principles and traditions of emergency response and citizen expectations of government intervention. In this study, large-scale consular emergency response was considered in relation to nine cases: three disasters, and three foreign ministries’ responses in each of those disasters. Each of the five journal articles used this multiple case study and each was designed to examine a particular facet of large-scale consular emergency response.

10 In 2011 the UK had 238 embassies, high commissions, consulates-general and consulates and Australia had 103 (FCO 2011; DFAT 2011, 241-45). Sweden had 98 embassies, consulates-general and consulates (MFA Sweden 2011). Figures do not include honorary consulates.
5. Research results and contributions

The overall research question of this dissertation was: how do governments respond to large-scale consular emergencies and how can these responses be understood and evaluated? The two central research questions derived from this overarching question were: firstly, how do governments and in particular foreign ministries respond to incidents abroad affecting a large number of foreign nationals, and what strategic and operational challenges do they face in implementing these responses?; and secondly, how does the 'consular' nature of this class of emergency (spanning the domestic and international arena) shape these challenges and response patterns? This dissertation contributes to the public administration and public sector crisis management literature by examining consular emergencies as a distinct class of contingency; studying this phenomenon in depth; and taking the study of consular assistance, decision making and implementation processes beyond the academic disciplines of foreign policy, diplomacy and law. Large-scale consular emergency response can be understood through the lens of public sector crisis management. However, large-scale consular emergency response has a unique set of considerations. The target of assistance is still the citizen and the concern is for citizens' wellbeing, but the environment is outside the national territory, with the response spanning both the foreign ministry headquarters and its offshore operations. Moreover, other foreign and non-government actors are present with their own agendas. This dissertation opens up this class of emergency and category of crisis management to systematic scrutiny. This was done through the use of case studies of three foreign ministries in three large-scale events: by applying public sector crisis management theory and research to the cases, and by collecting and synthesising empirical material, such as original interview material and reinterpreting already published documentation and academic literature.

Article I: Governments' Ability to Assist Nationals in Disasters Abroad: What Do We Know about Consular Emergency Management?

The first article took stock of what was already known about consular emergency response and examined the state of the research in this area. Using a public sector crisis management perspective, the article synthesised the literature on consular assistance and case studies of large-scale consular emergency response. Disparate literatures that had a common thread of
'consular' were brought together, including literature that was originally intended for other fields of study, such as military studies, media and communication studies, psychiatry or medicine. This was done by first searching for and within literature discussing the concept of 'consular'. Then, given the dearth of specifically consular literature, the study looked further afield at literature on the three information-rich event cases to see which findings, regarding priorities, issues, challenges, opportunities, and prominent themes, could be of use in the study of consular emergency response.

Although there was little research specifically on the concept of 'consular', there was already much analysis that could be drawn upon from various fields that had dealt with the issues inherent in consular emergencies. This had been done mostly through single (and some comparative) case studies. Although it was not possible to generalise these findings to all consular emergencies, it was possible to use the analysis to elucidate the constituent parts and key themes underlying a consular emergency response. These three themes were: the capacity of government machinery to respond, the spotlight on citizen needs and government actions, and the challenges of operating en-masse outside national borders. This article contributed to a public administration and crisis management understanding and evaluation of large-scale consular emergency response through the synthesis of disparate and cross-case literature and the distillation of three significant themes.

**Article II: Coping with Consular Emergencies: Four Key Governmental Coordination Relationships**

Foreign ministries are predominantly designated to be the 'lead agency' in consular response operations. The second article examined how foreign ministries performed the coordination work that this 'lead agency' role presupposed, and how the inter-organisational relationships that developed in this process shaped the nature of those operations. To contribute to the understanding of which actors impacted large-scale consular emergency responses, this article focused on the coordination relationships present in the consular response, within government and between governments. The second article found that for the foreign ministry as the lead agency, the challenge of managing the number of different relationships was made more difficult with so many diverse actors involved in a consular response, each with their own knowledge and understanding of the emergency.
The article resulted in a four-part organising perspective incorporating intra-departmental coordination, intra-governmental coordination, coordination and cooperation with the host governments, and with other responding governments. This framework was utilised as a lens through which the foreign ministry’s lead-agency role in consular emergencies could be examined. This perspective was used to spotlight the government relationships and understand how the consular nature of the emergencies shaped the response patterns and challenges. In this article the coordination relationships were characterised as necessitating reliance and trust within the foreign ministry; exhibiting confusion, familiarisation and learning within government; and shaped by traditional diplomacy between the host government and responding government. Between responding governments, there was pragmatic prioritisation of nationals but also a relationship exhibiting general goodwill and strategic cooperation. The second article contributed to addressing the overall research question by deepening knowledge of these key governmental relationships, how they function in an emergency, and the opportunities and pitfalls associated with each.

Article III: Distance and Displacement in Consular Emergencies: Assisting National Citizens in Distress Abroad

The third article examined factors that impacted the large-scale consular emergency responses. Given that consular response is predicated on citizens being outside national borders, the third article examined how the circumstances of distance, remoteness, and internationalisation affected the responses to consular emergencies. The ‘consular’ nature of this class of emergency was directly addressed in this study by considering the concept of distance from two different perspectives: the practical and logistical dimension, and the psychological and emotive dimension. The article utilised Drennan and McConnell’s (2007, pp. 214-17) concept of ‘remote crisis management’, and in particular the idea of ‘remote’, as an anchor for the analysis.

The study found that the state-focused response is firmly ingrained in large-scale consular emergency responses. Because responders perceived the emergencies as an operation to assist nationals using domestic bureaucracy, the response that was initiated first and foremost utilised national infrastructure such as government departments and diplomatic missions abroad. Because of this, the response could be initiated more rapidly. However, this allowed little
room for an international response that could utilise the knowledge and resources of multiple responding governments, particularly in areas that might make the response more efficient, such as sense making and coordination. The other dimension of distance (the psychological and emotive facet with the idea of citizenship, and citizens' sense of attachment to compatriots) further reinforced the difficulty of internationalising the response. This article illustrated how neglecting the emotional aspect of 'distance' in consular emergency response caused greater distress for citizens already suffering. This third article contributed to addressing the overall research question by deconstructing the concept of 'remote' and considering how the dynamics of distance affected key players and central factors, and in turn, how this shaped governments’ ability to respond.

**Article IV: Consular Assistance during Disasters and Conflicts Abroad: Bridging the Capability-Expectations Gap**

The fourth article examined how foreign ministry officials conceptualised the role of government in the three event cases. The fourth article established, from the perspective of foreign ministry officials involved in large-scale consular response, what disparities existed between citizens’ expectations of government during consular emergencies, and the government’s potential to meet these expectations. The article drew on the crisis management literature discussing citizens’ expectations of government assistance in the response phase of an emergency. This literature was used to contextualise interviews with thirteen foreign ministry officials and their perspective on the capability-expectations gap in large-scale consular emergency response.

The study found that the expectations that the government could, would, and should respond to assist citizens remained high even when citizens were outside the state. Yet capabilities to respond were reduced when the disaster occurred outside the state. The fourth article found that, even though the content of the expectations and priorities of citizens differed to domestic emergencies, the gap remained unbridgeable in consular emergency response. Reasons for this reflected those in general crisis management but were influenced by and compounded by challenges inherent in the consular and large-scale nature of the response to the emergency abroad. The visibility of a government’s capabilities was perceived by foreign ministry officials to matter to citizens. Although visibility in and of itself was not a sufficient response,
visibility of the response was considered to be a key element of the response. It was not enough for governments to simply provide assistance. For strategic and operational reasons, it was important for governments to demonstrate visibly that they were responding to citizens in need of assistance. The fourth article contributed to addressing the overall research question by demonstrating a major impediment to governments’ ability to respond in a way that meets citizens’ expectations, and examined a significant component of the challenge for governments responding to large-scale consular emergencies. In addition, the article contributed by consolidating the crisis management literature on the capability-expectations gap, and by demonstrating that this gap not only remains when the emergency is abroad, but may also be widened because of the reduced capability.

**Article V: Evaluating Government Performance during Consular Emergencies: Toward an Analytical Framework**

The fifth and final article sought to understand how we could meaningfully evaluate government performance in consular emergency responses. The article established an assessment framework to not only systematically describe, but also evaluate, large-scale consular emergency responses. It is not possible to measure consular emergency response against the same criteria as purely domestic emergency response as different priorities and concerns are exhibited during a consular response. Furthermore, because these emergencies differed greatly depending on the trigger, location and specifics of the emergency, they did not intuitively appear to be closely related and share characteristics, themes and challenges. This article deconstructed large-scale consular emergency responses, and utilised general crisis management principles and more specific consular challenges, to construct a framework for evaluating government performance. The framework’s relevance was demonstrated using vignettes from the three foreign ministries’ experiences in the three events. The six crisis response functions of the framework were translated into thirteen indicators of consular emergency response performance. The article also demonstrated that despite differences between the large-scale events, these incidents diverse in geography and demographics can be thought of as a distinct class of emergency for governments to manage. This article contributed to addressing the overall research question by developing a framework to deconstruct and evaluate these responses spanning the domestic and international arena.
The overall aim of the dissertation is to understand and evaluate large-scale consular emergency response. Each of the five articles contributes to addressing the two central research questions that were derived from the overall research question (see section 2 of this chapter). The concluding exegesis chapter that follows the five journal articles further discusses the results in relation to the overall research question. To understand how foreign ministries have responded previously and how the consular nature of the response affects the challenges and response patterns, the first article determines what is already known about the management of large-scale consular emergency responses. The second, third and fourth articles consider which factors and actors impact these responses, and examine the challenges faced in responses that span both the domestic and international arenas. Finally, the fifth article establishes an assessment framework that can not only systematically deconstruct and describe but also evaluate large-scale consular emergency responses.
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11 In this dissertation references appear in the following order: AAABCDEFGHIJKLMNOOPQRS TUVWXYZ (i.e. the three Swedish letters appear under ‘A’ and ‘O’, rather than following ‘Z’).


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Governments' Ability to Assist Nationals in Disasters Abroad: What Do We Know about Consular Emergency Management?

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This review draws attention to the need for consolidated inquiry into large-scale consular emergency management. Occurring outside national borders, these low-probability but high-impact events affect a large number of national citizens. They challenge governments' crisis management systems, and direct public and government attention to a sector that has been largely overlooked in public administration literature -- consular affairs. This review brings together the relevant literature on consular assistance and looks further afield to find analysis of emergency responses in case studies of three major consular emergencies. Three underlying themes emerge, central to a more nuanced understanding of the government response to large-scale emergencies affecting citizens abroad: the capacity of government machinery to respond to large incidents; the public spotlight on citizens' needs and government actions; and the characteristics of assisting nationals en masse outside national borders.

1. Introduction

When the safety of citizens is threatened by natural or man-made disasters abroad, foreign ministries' everyday task of consular assistance moves up the foreign ministry agenda and becomes a wider government concern. Events of early 2011 illustrate the variety, depth, and complexity of consular crisis management challenges faced by governments. In the course of 2 months, foreign nationals were impacted by civil unrest in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and major natural disasters in New Zealand and Japan. These events prompted foreign governments and their foreign ministries to prepare for and undertake evacuations of their citizens (or defend their decisions not to evacuate); respond to numerous and simultaneous requests for consular assistance from their nationals; and process thousands of inquiries from friends and family concerned for citizens in affected areas. Ease of travel, increased mobility, and permeable borders allow individuals to travel further afield. Yet, individuals do not cease being citizens when they leave the borders of their state. While citizens are abroad, during times of en masse consular assistance, the relevance of the state in relation to the well-being of citizens is brought into sharp relief.

The purpose of this review is to map out the literature on large-scale consular emergency management. From a public administration perspective, there has been little consolidated inquiry into the concept of consular emergency management. However, various disciplines have examined the consular facet of a disaster or incident through case studies. While these tend not to use consular terminology, the analyses can contrib-
ute to better comprehension of consular assistance in the context of large-scale events. To put ‘large-scale consular emergency management’ in the context of broader government, one of the tasks of the foreign ministry, along with diplomacy, foreign policy, and security, is consular services or consular affairs. One of the responsibilities of consular affairs is consular assistance. Day-to-day consular assistance is largely comprised of cases of individuals who have found themselves in distress while abroad. However, one of the high-profile, demanding, and complex consular assistance tasks is ‘large-scale consular emergency management’.

Large-scale consular emergencies are low-probability but high-impact events. They involve many actors, but at the core are the state and its citizens. Various arms of government play important roles in consular emergency management. However, the foreign ministry is the agency responsible for consular assistance, and tasked with leading the emergency response. For this reason, the focus of this review remains on consular assistance issues relevant to the foreign ministry as lead agency. ‘Consular assistance’ is used here in the broad sense of the term. This includes formal consular assistance outlined in consular service guidelines, but also more general or ad hoc assistance provided by consular officers and government respondents. As most foreign ministries only offer general guidelines as to what citizens can expect from their government during large-scale emergencies abroad, expectations may be beyond what governments are obliged to provide.

The first place to look for academic analysis on consular emergency management would naturally be consular affairs literature. However, as Heijmans and Melissen (2007, p. 19) observed, ‘with the exception of the legal approach of consular relations and more recent studies about visa diplomacy, academics have so far pretty much neglected consular affairs’. Even in the practice of foreign policy and diplomacy, it has been argued that the significance of consular services has been underestimated from the outset (Leira & Neumann, 2008). However, once the literature search is broadened to include case studies of specific consular emergencies, a more detailed body of work emerges. In reviewing and synthesizing relevant literature, three significant themes emerged as worthy of further inquiry:

1. Characteristics of assisting nationals en masse outside national borders;
2. The public spotlight on the needs of citizens and actions of government;
3. The capacity of the government machinery to respond to large-scale incidents abroad.

The first theme reflects the nature of consular work, which operates in both a domestic and international domain. Legal, cultural, and logistical difficulties are part of the challenge of providing assistance to nationals while they are outside national borders. The second theme, which is embedded, is the general crisis management challenge of managing high-profile operations. In the case of consular emergencies, the public spotlight is on citizens in distress and their families, and questions centre on what government is doing (or should be doing) to alleviate their suffering. The third theme (the capacity of the government machinery to respond to the emergency and assist citizens) is embedded in questions of what the government can actually do. For instance, what resources are available and how they can be utilized, given the distance and international circumstances of the emergency.

Given the dearth of public administration literature on consular assistance, this review employed two principal search strategies for consular literature. First, literature dealing directly with the concept of ‘consular’ was considered, particularly in relation to large-scale incidents. Then, the broader academic literature was scoured for case studies of large-scale incidents. Empirical case studies were highly informative in understanding large-scale consular emergency management as a concept, even if there was no specific mention of consular assistance. Particular attention was given to the fields of public administration, political science, policy, and emergency management and the three information-rich cases of the 2002 Bali bombing, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and 2006 evacuations from Lebanon. This review aims to synthesize disparate case studies and cross-case research to establish what we know about the capacity and limits of governments’ ability to assist citizens in emergencies abroad.

2. Locating literature on consular emergency management

There is no consolidated literature on consular emergency management. As such, the following section provides an overview of the location of relevant literature and trends within. Much of the literature that deals directly with the concept of ‘consular affairs’ comes from a diplomacy perspective (see especially, Melissen & Fernández, 2011) or a legal perspective (see especially, Lee, 1961; Lee & Quigley, 2008). The diplomacy literature tends to focus on European integration and the evolving responsibilities of European Union (EU) member states (see for example, Heijmans & Melissen, 2007, pp. 14–19; special issue The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 2008, Vol. 3; Fernández, 2011; Okano-Heijmans, 2011, pp. 35–40). The legal literature on consular affairs is concerned primarily with the consular rights of individuals and how the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations is interpreted. There is little written on the legal aspect of large-scale assistance. In their authoritative text, Consular Law and Practice, Lee and Quigley (2008, pp. 118–121) touched upon large-scale consular
emergency management following disasters. They categorize it as a subset of ‘group protection’, which more often covers assistance for ‘sending-state nationals’, such as foreign workers, in the context of potential mistreatment by the ‘receiving state’.

In the public administration and crisis management literature, there has been little treatment of ‘consular’ as a concept or ‘consular emergencies’ as an entity different from domestic emergencies. However, some groundwork has been laid. Drennan and McConnell (2007, pp. 214–217) utilized a public crisis management perspective and derived logistical challenges that policy practitioners have faced in recent emergencies, for instance, information gaps, on-the-ground operational issues, political messaging, and decentralization of the response. They label this ‘remote crisis management’, which in essence equates to large-scale consular emergency response. Further to this, Lindström’s (2009) chapter on EU consular cooperation in crisis situations reflects growing recognition that consular assistance is pertinent to public sector crisis management. Massive disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami have contributed to this shift.

The tsunami-affected nationals of more than 40 countries and the assistance given to foreign nationals in the immediate aftermath became the focus of a number of studies from a public crisis management perspective. Because multiple countries’ nationals were affected, it was possible for researchers to conduct comparative case studies of government responses. Disasters that disproportionately affected certain nationalities or received significant media attention also prompted academic reflection and analysis. Literature coming out of the Nordic countries following the tsunami addressed the physical and mental health consequences for foreign nationals. For example, the mental trauma suffered by survivors (Heir and Weisaeth, 2008; Råholm, Arman, & Rehnsfeldt, 2008; Johannesson, Lundin, Hultman, Lindam, Øyste-As, Arnberg, & Michel, 2009a; Johannesson, Michel, Hultman, Lindam, Arnberg, & Lundin; 2009b; Kraemer, Wittmann, Jenewein, & Schnyder, 2009; Heir, Rosendal, Johannesson, Michel, Mortensen, Weisaeth, Andersen, & Hultman, 2010), among affected children (Jensen, Dyb, & Nygaard, 2009), among those indirectly affected (Kristensen, Weisaeth, & Heir, 2009), among responders (Thoresen, Tennes- nes, Vibe Lindgaard, Lie Andreassen, & Weisaeth, 2009), and even among individuals not directly affected by the tsunami (Vassfjäll, Peters, & Slovic, 2008).

Another example comes from Australia. The 2002 nightclub bombings on the Indonesian island of Bali killed more than 150 foreign nationals, including 88 Australians, and injured many more. The bombings triggered a massive Australian whole-of-government and medical response. This is reflected in the numerous first-hand accounts by responders and senior-level decision makers and the willingness of key players to be interviewed for studies (see especially, Griffiths, Hilton, & Lain, 2003; Paul, 2005; Roach & Kemish, 2006; Gyngell & Wesley, 2007). These cases are rarely discussed as explicitly ‘consular’. However, they provide invaluable insights into broadly applicable consular issues. For example, difficulties of coordination and cooperation; working in a foreign country in a complex and confronting environment; and the physical and psychological impact these large-scale events can have on survivors, responders, and the not-directly-affected alike. By looking further afield in the academic literature, and locating these case studies of large-scale consular emergency management, it is possible to extract relevant lessons for a public administration perspective.

While the academic work on consular affairs is sparse, there has been reflection and considered evaluation among government practitioners. Although not included in the thematic analysis of academic literature in this review, a number of internal and external inquiries, evaluations, and reports have followed major consular emergencies. For example, the magnitude of the tsunami caught many governments and foreign ministries off guard. This spurred inquiries, which assigned responsibility for poor management or provided lessons for improving the response. Two such examples can be found in the United Kingdom and Sweden. The high-profile Swedish Tsunami Commission (2005) found both systemic and attitudinal problems within the government response and generated a number of changes in government organization. The British inquiry, conducted by the National Audit Office and the Zito Trust (2006), focused specifically on the experiences of UK nationals who were affected by the disaster. The inquiry identified a need for improved planning and preparation, communication and information handling, as well as empathetic and long-term support for those affected.

Evaluation exercises are also commonly conducted by or for the responding department or relevant government agencies. For example, there had been an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 Canadians in Lebanon when the conflict with Israel erupted in mid-2006. The Canadian Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade’s (2007) report on the evacuations and implications for the Canadian government emphasized the ‘changing international landscape’, with the need to improve embassy resources, better utilize other government departments’ expertise, and further examine issues of citizenship. Similarly, reports aimed at practitioners working in specialist areas, such as medical and psychological care in disasters, can inform analyses of large-scale consular emergency management more broadly. The Swedish Committee for Disaster Medicine Studies (Kamedor, 2008), offered lessons from incident case studies. Brolén, Ortenwall, and Osterhed (2007) studied the Australian aeromedical evacuations after...
the Bali attack and compared it with Scandinavian actions. The 2008 Kamedo report on the tsunami focused on the care given to survivors as they were transported from Thailand to Sweden, and Kulling and Sigurdsson (2008) studied the Swedish evacuations from Lebanon, focusing on the actions of the National Board of Health and Welfare. These inquiries and reviews are not only a source of empirical material, but a source of knowledge and practical experience and analysis.

Taking an explicitly public administration perspective on large-scale consular emergency management, the following sections examine three primary ground-level issues. Firstly, the features associated with responding to a large number of citizens in distress outside national borders; secondly, the public spotlight on the needs of citizens and the government’s response to these needs; and finally, the capacity of the government machinery to respond to large-scale consular emergencies.

3. Assisting nationals outside national borders

Although the disaster is located abroad, the emergency response is focused on nationals. As such, it becomes a form of domestic emergency (i.e., between a state and its citizens), yet with concerns that do not pervade a purely domestic response. These challenges, which do not feature prominently in domestic disasters or non-consular foreign disasters, complicate responding governments’ tasks. Some such challenges include distance and travel; cross-cultural differences and language; differing standards of resources or procedures; and questions concerning sovereignty and citizenship (Tindall, 2010a). Scanlon’s (2006) study of international cooperation following the tsunami addressed the nature of conducting complex work in a foreign country while facing cross-cultural issues. The concerns that arose, such as negotiating others’ perceptions of ‘foreignness’ or belonging to a state, were part of the challenge of conducting large-scale consular operations abroad.

In a further study of call centres following the tsunami, Scanlon (2007a, pp. 236–237) addressed the nature of the calls received. He stressed the important role of the foreign ministry for those abroad who may be facing ‘language and cultural barriers and lack of knowledge [that] make it difficult for them to seek information from institutions in the country where the incident occurred’. Scanlon’s studies (2006, 2007a) highlighted key areas of a large-scale consular response. Among his findings were the need for foreign ministries to understand and plan for the nature of the distress calls and the inquiries that they will be receiving at home; the cross-cultural issues they will be facing abroad; and the emotional reliance on government officials that citizens may display when they, or loved ones, are caught up in an emergency abroad.

This national-centric perspective has implications for how EU or third-party governments cooperate and assist each other’s citizens abroad during consular emergencies. Fernández, among others (see also Heijmans & Melissen, 2007, p. 14; Okano-Heijmans, 2011, p. 37), noted the effect major events (such as September 11, 2001, the 2002 Bali bombings, the 2004 tsunami, and 2006 evacuations from Lebanon) have had in shifting the question of European consular assistance up the agenda. Primarily, consular affairs remain a national competency and in terms of emotional support for citizens, this may be beneficial. Porzio (2008, p. 95) too acknowledged the relationship between ‘national sensitivities and public perception’ when a domestic emergency is internationalized. Especially in times of crisis, ‘people are stressed and will react more easily to someone who not only speaks their language but also understands their background, national habits, etc.’

Given that consular services remain a national competency, national citizenship is brought to the fore in consular emergency management, especially now that a larger number of individuals hold dual citizenship. Issues of citizenship make it challenging for governments to estimate the number of citizens that may need assistance and is of particular concern in countries with a strong history of immigration, such as Australia and Canada. In a study of the Canadian evacuations from Lebanon, in which a large contingent were dual Lebanese-Canadian citizens, Nyers (2010, p. 58) observed that, ‘the citizen – is not the ambiguous identity it had been assumed to be’. Dudgeon (2006) provided an account of the Australian evacuations from Lebanon from the perspective of interdepartmental coordination relationships. He questioned the level of assistance the Australian government demonstrated during the evacuations, highlighting the policy of not charging for evacuations and extending consular assistance to all Australians even if they were not travelling on their Australian passport at the time. He argued that in ‘crisis evacuations in future the increasing prevalence of dual citizenship and access to and use of passports of convenience, is likely to pose the same major difficulties about how many Australians are involved, who they are and what are their whereabouts and intentions’ (Dudgeon, 2006, p. 25).

Questions of citizenship extend to questions of national identity and belonging when citizens are abroad. In a study of Finnish media reporting during the tsunami, Kivikuru (2006, p. 505) found that ‘as a media event, the tsunami was framed as genuinely Finnish . . . focusing entirely on Finns’. According to Olofsson and Rashid (2008) the Swedish media frame extended to exclude Swedish citizens and residents who did not fit into the national stereotype. The use of national narra-
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tives and collective memory in the Australian news media following the Bali bombings was studied by West (2008), who concluded that the portrayal of 'national heroic narratives and mythologies', resulted in the promotioin of an isolationist, insular, and provincial Australian nationalism.

Political sovereignty is a further constraint on governments that are launching operations to assist nationals outside national borders. White (2007, p. 9) cited the example of Australians affected by Hurricane Katrina in the United States whereby 'Australian officials operating in another country and subject to that country's laws and policies, do not have a free hand. They can only do what the host country is willing to let them do.' This observation is reinforced by Ulrich's (2007) study of 33 foreign governments' assistance to nationals during Hurricane Katrina. Ulrich (2007) found that some consular operations relied heavily, at times excessively, on 'the US structure of assistance' (pp. 7, 12), while in other cases, consular officers ignored or circumvented US laws in order to evacuate foreign nationals (pp. 4–5). These observations illustrate Drennan and McConnell's (2007) concept of 'remote crisis management', which was subsequently utilized by Schwarz and McConnell (2009) in their study of the 2006 Australian evacuations from Lebanon. Schwarz and McConnell (2009, p. 234) elaborated on the idea of 'political remoteness' in which government responders lack 'political sovereignty to take authoritative decisions' and lack 'local capacity in terms of actors, institutions, processes, and resources for the purposes of decision making, information gathering, information dissemination, and so on'.

Issues of sovereignty come to bear in consular emergency management in multiple ways. As we saw above, crisis managers attempt to assist their compatriots in a disaster-stricken country, in which they do not have the authority that they would have at home. The transfer of political sovereignty to the supranational EU, and the burden that smaller EU member states place on larger states, are two issues of the European project that are brought to the fore in large-scale consular emergency management. According to Fernández (2008, p. 35), consular affairs is yet another example of both European integration and discord within the process: 'the harmonization of consular rules and practices reflects the shift in politics from the national to the European sphere, and at the same time, expresses the inherent difficulties in this process of power transfer'. She argued that recent large-scale emergencies demonstrated the limitation of the European consular system that was established in the early 1990s. This system addresses only individual and common cases, and neglects out-of-the-ordinary events that affect a number of citizens in a non-EU country in which they do not have diplomatic representation (Fernández, 2008, p. 26).

Fernández's (2008) argument highlights the continued relevance of sovereignty in the face of globalization, or more specifically, the integration and gradual transfer of traditionally national tasks. Moreover, as Lindström (2009, p. 121) argued from a coordination perspective, while some EU member states seek more formal agreements and legally binding decisions, there remains 'a broad consensus that this is an area of member state competence solely'. During consular emergency response, the limit of a government's duty of care for its nationals abroad is already difficult to define. This issue is made more complex if one includes questions of duty to other foreign nationals, and whether there is the capacity to assist these nationals as effectively as the citizens' own governments.

Despite moves to clarify consular policy regarding what individuals can expect of their government while abroad, the limits of government responsibility during large-scale events remains ambiguous. In his policy brief, White (2007, p. 3) posed a series of challenging questions that are applicable to most governments with a developed consular assistance function. Of relevance here are (1) what level of responsibility should individuals take for themselves while abroad?; (2) do governments 'risk creating a moral hazard by offering help to those who are too feeble to look after themselves?'; (3) who should qualify for assistance?; (4) what circumstances warrant government action?; and (5) to what extent should governments 'compromise wider national interests to support or assist individuals in trouble'? Questions of responsibility during large-scale disasters are complex. They are further complicated by the sudden surge of media commentary and public discussion that follows large-scale incidents. With governments attempting to manage citizen expectations and deal with media portrayals of citizen needs and government actions, this public spotlight becomes an important feature of a public administration perspective on consular emergency management.

4. Citizen needs and government actions in the spotlight

Disasters abroad that affect masses naturally gain a great deal of media attention. Coverage of a foreign disaster takes on an additional focus in the domestic news when nationals are among the affected. The public spotlight on government actions or inaction, and the spotlight on the (met or unmet) needs of the citizens abroad and their families back home, is important in a public administration perspective on consular assistance. Government communication with the public is essential for consular emergency management, and as Okano-Heijmans (2011) argued, consular affairs has become central to the foreign ministry's relations with the public. This trend of mediatization is a prominent
theme in the literature on consular affairs. The government and foreign ministry receive positive press when they demonstrate the capacity to rescue citizens, but criticism when they are seen to violate a perceived, but ill-defined, duty to assist citizens abroad. This is reflected in what Heijmans and Melissen (2007, p. 19) consider to be a key concern for foreign ministries, the increasing priority of ‘domestic reputation management’.

Public expectations are integral in the character of the media portrayal of the consular emergency response (Okano-Heijmans, 2011, pp. 24–27). These expectations may surpass the capacity of a government to respond. Jones-Bos and van Daalen (2008) detailed changes in two decades of consular services and its changing placement and role within the foreign ministry. They noted the growing demand for consular services, the raised citizen expectations, an increased media spotlight, and an increased need for public engagement and communication. Public expectations and the media spotlight put pressure on governments to respond rapidly and extensively; however, there are limits to what governments can reasonably do given the circumstances of each disaster. Using the 2006 Lebanon evacuations as an example, White (2007) noted the initial public criticisms the government received for not rapidly evacuating Australians from the war zone. However, he has questioned how much more the government could realistically and reasonably have done given the distance between the two countries, and the ‘complex and dangerous’ war zone that was situated outside Australia’s ‘area of direct strategic interest’ (White, 2007, p. 8). Expectation management therefore becomes part of the response. Schwarz and McConnell’s (2009, p. 245) study of the Australian evacuation from Lebanon found that the Australian government managed expectations through constant messaging of the status of Australia as an ‘innocent third party’ operating in a war zone. Consequently, responsibility was deflected from leaders and key officials and the focus shifted to the ‘unfortunate circumstance’.

This theme of publicly managing citizen expectations is seen in much of the consular literature, not only in relation to the emergency response, but also ahead of the next disaster. The positive publicity created when governments go above and beyond to assist citizens, can later become problematic when members of the public expect a similar response in a subsequent emergency. White (2007, p. 10) posited that ‘we take less care ourselves to avoid risks if we expect others to look after us’ and of this ‘moral hazard’ he cited the Australian government’s warning to citizens to remove themselves from a potential crisis situation under their own steam while still possible. White (2007, p. 10) contended that the more the citizens ‘expect that, if things really deteriorate, the Government will send in the ADF [Australian Defence Force] to rescue them, the more they

will be tempted to ignore such warnings, and wait for the Government to fly them out – often free of charge – rather than pay to get themselves to safety’. He has argued that the government needs to clarify publicly ahead of time, what citizens should expect during emergencies abroad so that they can understand the risks of the situation (White, 2007, p. 12).

Citizen engagement with the media and the effect of this on the consular response is another theme within the literature. Okano-Heijmans (2011, p. 28) argued that this wider public engagement forces traditionally low-priority tasks such as consular affairs up the foreign ministry’s agenda, and that the responsibility for the well-being of citizens abroad is ‘increasingly a diplomatic concern’. Citizens can now more easily influence politics and the media, and ‘highly mediatised consular assistance thereby risks rendering diplomacy overly emotive and sometimes in conflict with broader national interests’ (Okano-Heijmans, 2011, p. 25).

Citizen demands for up-to-date information, and public engagement with traditional and new media were the focus of empirical studies of domestic media consumption that emerged following the tsunami disaster.

Kivikuru (2006) analyzed the consumption of information and news media sources that were utilized and accessed in Finland during the tsunami response, and argued that the need for information and media engagement among the Finnish public was great in the first days. Once the media onslaught began the traditional modes of media ‘supplied melodrama, offered emotive details but also somewhat simplified value judgements’ (Kivikuru, 2006, p. 515). Furthermore, the conventional media reporting and government websites were inadequate because of Christmas holiday scheduling and the delayed response. The public turned to the Internet and their mobile phones to allow for more interactive information gathering and substantially increased the flow of calls and text messages (Kivikuru, 2006, p. 505). Robinson and Robinson (2006) and Gordon (2007) analyzed the use of mobile phones in the tsunami aftermath. Both studies reiterated this immediate increase in their use to connect relatives and friends – but also to bypass the conventional media reporting, and temporarily privilege ‘citizen journalism’ with visual images and first-hand accounts. Kivikuru (2006, p. 517), however, concluded that despite the initial surge in new media usage by both citizens and government departments, these did not represent a new model of interaction but perpetuated ‘the same sender-receiver model repeated in the mass media’. Public attention increased dramatically, but it was difficult to ascertain the nature of public opinions and perspectives in the aftermath of a consular emergency.

There is a clear need for governments to engage in more interactive modes of communication when attempting to communicate with affected citizens and
the broader public during a consular emergency. This is particularly important because perceptions of abandonment or neglect of citizens can negatively affect public confidence in the government’s political leadership and crisis management abilities. Strombäck and Nord (2006, p. 798) studied the Swedish media and public perceptions of the government and the political leadership in the aftermath of the tsunami. They found that ‘the government remained silent for far too long’. Existing low public confidence in the effectiveness of the political leadership and government remained so following the tsunami, and severe criticism towards the prime minister and foreign minister continued (Strombäck & Nord, 2006, p. 798).

Brandström, Kuipers, and Daleus (2008) conducted a comparative study of tsunami responses in three severely affected Nordic countries: Sweden, Norway, and Finland. With a focus on processes of blame and framing strategies, they noted the variation in public and media criticism of Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish political leaders and governments. Brandström et al. (2008, p. 141) found that each of the countries initially tried to deflect responsibility by framing the disaster as an ‘act of God’ and denied that errors and flaws in the government response had exacerbated the emergency. The cases diverged notably however, as ‘the public apologies by the Finnish and Norwegian governments appeared to have had a cushioning effect on the blaming process and the political elite could escape further damage ... The Swedish government’s reaction [of denial of wrongdoing and mismanagement and unsuccessful shving of blame down the ranks] stands in sharp contrast to this apologetic approach’ (Brandström et al., 2008, p. 141).

The research and analysis, particularly in these post-tsunami studies, highlights the importance of the media in shaping the political frame of consular emergency management and influencing public perceptions of the responsibility governments have for their citizens abroad. Increased citizen engagement and demand for information during consular emergencies puts a public spotlight on governments. This can function as positive public relations when the government is seen to be caring for its citizens, but can be negative when the media narrative is abandonment or blame deflection. Looking beyond what governments appear to be doing, or perceptions of what they should be doing, it is necessary to consider the literature on what governments can practically do when responding to citizens caught in disasters abroad.

5. Government response capacity

The third major theme of the literature is the capacity of the government machinery to respond to large-scale incidents affecting citizens abroad. Much of the consular literature and many of the case studies touch upon the need to increase capacity and the problems of limited resources. Governments’ capacity to respond is also highly contingent on cooperation with private industry and private actors such as volunteers and specialists, and on interdepartmental and intergovernmental cooperation and coordination (Tindall, 2010b). Yet, in efforts to increase the capacity of national governments, the role played by the private industry (for example, airlines or insurance agencies) and institutions such as the EU, remains undefined and problematic.

White (2007, p. 1) identified three major challenges for Australian large-scale consular response: insufficient government resources; citizen expectations that exceed a government’s capacity to respond; and the attention and resources that are drawn away from other key foreign ministry tasks. Broadbent, Maley, Orgill, Shergold, Smith, and Gyngell (2009, p. 48) concurred, arguing that the dilemma faced is that ‘taxpayers are entitled to appropriate support from government when they are travelling overseas, but soaring and, in many cases, unrealistic demands for consular services are a major reason for the hollowing out of the overseas diplomatic network’. Enormous pressure is placed on diplomatic missions even during well-managed consular emergencies.

Even in a relatively large mission, such as the Australian embassy in Jakarta, White (2007, p. 11) has observed that the ‘small political staff is overstretched even without the periodic spikes of consular work which can absorb 75% of their effort.’ Limited personnel abroad is a capacity issue that is ever present in the literature. While this often relates to insufficient numbers, there are also concerns regarding the emotional impact on responders given the stressful tasks involved in responding to a large-scale incident. Two American accounts of the Bali bombings and tsunami response focused on the support for consular officers who faced challenging situations and the ‘emotional toll’ it took (Enslin, 2003, p. 27), and the connections made between the consular officers and the individuals they located and assisted (Honley, 2005, pp. 46–50). There have been studies of the social worker and crisis intervention teams sent to the tsunami-affected areas to support foreign nationals, and the ethical and practical questions of where their tasks fit within the overall government response (Bronisch, Maragkos, Freyer, Muller-Cyran, Butollo, Weimbs, & Platiel, 2006; Manning, Millar, Newton, & Webb, 2007). From a responder perspective, the need to change procedure at primary receiving hospitals (Guscott, Guscott, Malingambi, & Parker, 2007) and the need to be alert to responders’ fatigue levels has also been examined (Cook, Smart, & Stephenson, 2006; Björnsson, Kristjánsson, & Möller, 2008).

Comparisons between different government responses to the same incident, while not ideal...
positions, do shed light on capacity issues and best practices. Dickie (2007, pp. 155–158) recounted the actions of key players and British public sentiment in both the Bali and tsunami response. He described the British Bali response as delayed, uncoordinated, perceived to be uncaring, and paling in comparison to the Australian response. A multi-country empirical study conducted by Scanlon (2007a) post-tsunami, considered the massive strain placed on national call centres with family members and friends trying to contact the foreign ministry for information and to provide information on their loved ones. He compared nine governments’ responses and wide-ranging strategies of dealing with the mass influx of calls to (and in many cases overloading of) inadequate government call centres. His findings of transferable best practices to improve capacity, included standardized electronic forms for data collection, using personnel trained in call handling and providing them with an information tool-kit, back-up systems compatible between government agencies, and a proactive media strategy.

Literature on best practices and improving capacity is also found in the form of reflections and lessons learned by senior-level practitioners, especially addressing the challenges of whole-of-government crisis response. Roach and Kemish’s (2006) chapter on the whole-of-government response to the Bali bombings also appeared as a section of the 2004 Australian Public Service Commission report, Connecting Government. Their guidelines for a whole-of-government crisis response were: plan early and test the plan; establish clear leadership; define roles of all players early; use formal chains of command; and ensure strong public affairs management (Management Advisory Committee, 2004, p. 110; Roach & Kemish, 2006, p. 288). Paul (2005) provided an important perspective on the Australian Bali bombing response from outside the foreign ministry. Reiterating the above lessons, she offered insight into the ongoing learning process, including realizing the extent to which it was a domestic emergency; the evolving coordination structure over the course of days; and the communication difficulties as the departments began working together.

Shergold (2005, p. 47) reflected on how the public service in Canberra responded to the tsunami and lessons learned. He focused on the coordination of government departments with an emphasis on the importance of having clear roles for each department, and continuity in the roles of the officials who were involved from the start of the emergency response, even when more senior officials arrived. Paterson (2006, p. 3) observed in his high-level operational perspective on the tsunami, that regular disaster response is a relatively new skill set and planning priority for foreign ministry professionals. He argued that the lessons learned in the Bali response were essential to the tsunami response.

The limited resource available to governments outside territorial borders is another ‘capacity’ theme evident in the literature. Integral in this is a discussion of sharing the burden and resources between responding countries and of outsourcing tasks to other actors. Okano-Heijmans (2011, p. 31) addressed the ability of consular services to increase their capacity through outsourcing to private industry and argued that the overall management of the consular response must remain a state responsibility, as per the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. Scanlon (2007b) highlighted the highly complex multi-actor, and increasingly high-tech, environment in which the consular operations are conducted. In relation to the international tsunami response, he considered the benefits that private companies can provide to governments and their foreign ministries in many areas of consular response, boosting their capacity to respond: from on-the-ground handling of the deceased to cross-national disaster victim identification processes, to mass call handling in the tourists’ home countries. However appealing it may be for governments to bring in specialists and private industry to increase capacity, there are legal considerations as to where the ultimate responsibility lies for actions taken, and for resources used, during consular assistance operations.

While management of the consular emergency response cannot be outsourced, engagement and cooperation, particularly between foreign ministries, in more specific areas, can lead to transferable lessons and best practices. This in turn, increases preparedness for the next consular emergency response. Addressing one of the key logistical challenges that governments have faced in recent large-scale emergencies, Scanlon (2006) reflected on the challenge of international cooperation in handling deceased foreign nationals. Other examples include lessons on the possible role of civilian doctors in mass casualty events abroad (Southwick, Pethick, Thalassemi, Vijayasakaran, & Hogg, 2002), the availability of civilian aeromedical evacuation (Tran, Garner, & Morrison, 2003; Astrand, Nilsson, Ederoth, Linde, Dagoö, & Burgerhout, 2006; Björnsson et al., 2008), and the difficulties with well-intentioned volunteers who, without proper leadership or guidance, can further complicate a process such as handling of the deceased (Watts, 2002).

Other operational lessons in improving consular response capacity can be found, particularly within the medical and defence force literature. For example, the challenges and advantages of receiving patients at a home-country hospital after many hours lead time, and the difficulties of coordination within a national structure (Palmer, Stephens, & Fisher, 2003; Taylor, O’Connor, St Leone, & Halpern, 2003). Further lessons include the need for multi-agency governmental cooperation in the aeromedical evacuation (Hampson, Cook, & Frederik-
Consular Emergency Management

sen, 2002) and government presence during the reception of evacuees at airports (Pajarinen, Leppäniemi, Castren, Silfvast, Haapiainen, Handolin, Reitala, Tukiainen, & Hirvensalo, 2004). The examples above have been gathered from a variety of academic literatures. Nonetheless, they can benefit public administration scholars and practitioners, as they illustrate the limits and opportunities for governments to provide assistance to their nationals, and engage other governments and actors to boost this capacity.

Examining the limits of cooperation, Okan-Heijmans (2010, p. 35) acknowledged that cooperation is only desirable for foreign ministries in so far as it 'does not distract from their responsibility towards their own domestic constituencies'. This is particularly relevant to the practicality of boosting capacity among EU member states and the potential for a joint EU consular response. Porzio (2008, p. 94) examined the tension between the EU and national governments in consular assistance. He argued that major events such as the evacuation from Lebanon are confirmation that consular cooperation is essential, given that 'even the best, widest and most resourceful consular services could not cope on their own'. Lindström (2009) also argued that these large-scale events act as catalysts for EU member states to continue intensifying their capacity and consular cooperation. Lindström (2009, p. 116), however, advocated a more modest role for EU cooperation in the response phase, with an emphasis on the sharing of information and assistance in evacuating other EU citizens. Similarly cautious, Fernández (2008, p. 28) neatly surmised three primary consequences and challenges presented by greater intergovernmental consular cooperation. Firstly, more cases to be handled; secondly, changes to 'existing administrative practices as a result of the adoption of coordinated protocols for action'; and finally, 'the change in mindset of officials as a consequence of no longer being solely at the service of their fellow nationals but of all EU citizens'.

On the discord between existing practices and protocol, Lindström (2009) also acknowledged that current differences between EU member states made cooperation more challenging. For example, EU member states' consular services have different institutional frameworks. For some, the right to consular assistance is a national law, while for others, it is a government policy. Furthermore, states have differing criteria for who is eligible for consular assistance and different policies on charging citizens for services such as evacuation (Lindström, 2009, pp. 111–112). These policy differences remain an issue when considering cooperation between governments assisting each other and each other's citizens in an emergency. Long-standing arrangements exist between states to provide consular assistance to each others' citizens when national diplomatic representatives are unavailable, for example, the bilateral agreement between Canada and Australia, or the agreement among the EU member states. However, this is not a reliable means of increasing response capacity in emergencies involving numerous nationalities and government actors.

In regard to the mindset of officials, Lindström (2009, p. 123) highlighted 'the gap between the political will and the consular departments on the ground' as a challenge to cooperation. Similarly, Porzio (2008) stressed that even if agreement was reached upon closer cooperation or integration, this may not lead to effective cooperation or coordination on the ground. According to Porzio (2008, p. 94), 'the political level can be enthusiastic about cooperation in the consular area, consular departments are definitely reluctant, probably because they are more aware of the specificity of consular obligations'. Throughout the literature, the capacity of governments to respond to large-scale incidents affecting citizens abroad is an ever-present concern. It can be found in reference to the limits of consular assistance; in theoretical discussions of a more integrated EU consular response; and in empirical studies of cooperation and coordination between governments during large-scale consular incidents.

6. Conclusions

The primary intention of this review was to provide a synopsis and synthesis of the relevant academic literature dealing with consular emergency management. Little has been written specifically on consular assistance from a public administration or public crisis management perspective. However, many case studies in a variety of fields have been conducted in the aftermath of large-scale consular emergencies, and pertinent themes have been considered in other fields. Their findings can inform our understandings of consular emergency management and consular assistance as a whole. A secondary aim of this review was to draw attention to the consular facet of the predominantly domestic task of ensuring the post-disaster well-being of citizens, as well as the consular component of governments' responses to foreign disasters. Initially examining the state of the literature on consular assistance, the legal and diplomacy perspectives were dominant. However, some important groundwork had been laid in the area of public administration and public crisis management. The second body of literature that was examined consisted of case studies, whereby the concept of 'consular' within case studies of three major consular emergencies was sought out. Crucial in better understanding the consular facet of public crisis management, this case study body of literature revealed highly reflective lessons and insights into concerns and priorities in practitioners' accounts of emergency response. It was also possible to look further afield. Even highly-technical
case studies from disciplines such as medicine, psychology, communications, and sociology, offered valuable contributions to a public administration perspective on consular emergency assistance and the constituent tasks and challenges faced by governments and their representatives in the field.

In consolidating the diverse literature, three noteworthy and interconnected themes emerged. These themes revealed key pressure points of consular emergency management. Some aspects reflected generic or ‘normal’ public crisis management challenges, such as media management. Others were pressure points because they compounded already complicated crisis management challenges. For instance, the nature of assisting nationals outside national borders meant that classic crisis management tasks were entwined with cross-cultural issues, and with questions regarding citizenship and the limits of government responsibility for citizens outside the state. Consular officials are obliged to respect and work within the laws of the state they are operating in, but this can conflict with their objective of locating and evacuating citizens and other foreign nationals. These issues are further complicated by European consular cooperation and the added component of concurrent national and EU citizenship. Even with further clarification of the European consular system, it takes time for protocols to become embodied in the procedures of national consular services, and it takes time for citizens to realize that they have access to broader networks of assistance.

The public spotlight on citizen needs and government actions embodied issues of managing public expectations and the mediatization of the government response (or lack of response). Citizens’ engagement with the media and increased demand for information impacted government responses to consular emergencies. Even general crisis management challenges, such as media management, take on additional dimensions when information is coming in from geographically distant or remote locations. A spotlight on unmet citizen needs will always present a challenge. However, the situation becomes more complicated when it is unclear whether the government has the responsibility, let alone the ability, to meet those needs in a foreign disaster.

All large-scale incidents challenge the capacity of the government machinery to respond. However, compared to purely domestic emergencies, consular emergencies present many additional constraints relating to distance and access. Such constraints may also impede efforts to rapidly scale up the response when trying to supplement limited resources and staff abroad. Furthermore, this consular emergencies reflect different priorities to purely domestic incidents. In consular emergency management, the primary targets of assistance are citizens in distress. However, when a natural or man-made disaster strikes at home, the economy and critical infra-

structure of the state are also high-level concerns for the response and recovery. Another key pressure point during consular emergency management is the presence of foreign actors. Outsourcing and intergovernmental cooperation can ease the burden, but can also create further issues as consular affairs remains primarily within national governments’ realm of responsibility.

These three underlying themes (and the challenges they present) are intrinsically linked and prompt a number of interrelated questions. The nature of consular emergencies (operating outside national borders on a domestic matter) affects the capacity of governments to respond effectively. When the capacity of a government to respond is compromised, this is reflected (and often exaggerated) in the public spotlight. Such media attention has the potential to impact perceptions of a government’s ability to secure the safety of its citizens.

It also challenges the legitimacy of the state in its consular assistance role and the legitimacy of the consular institution as a whole. The public spotlight on the government response has the potential to seed expectations that the state ‘should’ be capable of responding rapidly and effectively with all available resources. This prompts discussion of state duty and responsibility. However, media portrayals rarely take into account the nuances of complex issues of citizenship and political sovereignty that responders have to contend with. This conversely risks creating a moral hazard when the capacity and willingness to intervene is repeatedly demonstrated, or when the consular facet of foreign relations threatens to overshadow or compromise other national interests or diplomatic relations with foreign actors.

When analyzing the concept of ‘consular emergencies’, the usefulness of systematic cross-country comparisons in the public crisis management literature was evident (i.e., Scanlon, 2007a; Brandström et al., 2008). More cross-case research is needed to better understand the various tasks and challenges that the foreign ministry may face when managing a major consular emergency. There is a great deal of scope to investigate in depth, the underlying themes of this review. More specifically, an area ripe for further methodical examination is citizen expectations of government during consular emergencies. These expectations are frequently touched upon in both academic and practitioner texts and are said to be on the rise, but the details, nature, and characteristics of these expectations remains opaque. This may be due to the difficulties of pinning down citizen expectations that shift with the diverse circumstances of each event and vary greatly during post-incident mediatization. Greater clarification and a better understanding of the legal aspects and policy challenges of en masse consular assistance as distinct from individual consular cases is also warranted. Similarly, it is necessary to further scrutinize
issues of responsibility. How much support should or can the government reasonably provide to citizens abroad, and how much of a priority should this be for government? As there is no strict or detailed government consular policy on large-scale incidents, there is also a need to probe issues of government decision making, and to deconstruct and evaluate government actions and operations.

Each disaster will present diverse challenges for foreign governments, and in each disaster, governments will have differing capacities to respond. Despite these disparities, lessons can be transferred from one country’s experience to another and from previous emergency responses. The bodies of literature surveyed in this review indicate concerted reflection and lesson implementation following large-scale events. However, we are also witnessing increasing pace and accessibility of travel, enticing more citizens abroad each year. Even in these low-probability events, the questions of consular assistance — of capacity, of citizen needs and public perceptions, of operating outside national borders — remain, and given their high-impact status, will likely come to the fore again.

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Coping with consular emergencies: four key governmental coordination relationships

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Abstract: When a large number of foreign nationals are affected by a disaster while abroad, their respective governments face public and media pressure to assist their citizens. For governments to evacuate citizens, locate missing, assist injured, support relatives or identify and repatriate the deceased, the foreign ministry must coordinate its personnel, establish a whole-of-government response and cooperate with foreign governments. To better understand how governments coordinate and cooperate internally and externally to assist citizens, this paper utilised a ‘structured and focused’ comparative approach. The ‘structure’ was provided by three (Australia, Sweden and the UK) foreign ministries’ consular responses to three large-scale events: the 2002 Bali bombings, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2006 evacuations from Lebanon. For the focus, the study employed an organising perspective. Government actions were considered through the lens of four key coordination relationships, within and between governments, in order to establish what role government plays and to identify limits and opportunities present in the response.

Keywords: consular services; crisis coordination; emergency response; foreign ministry; intergovernmental cooperation.


Biographical notes: Karen Tindall is a Doctoral candidate and Research Assistant at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. She has been a visiting researcher at the National Center for Crisis Management Research and Training, Sweden, and the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia, and is completing a doctorate on large-scale consular emergency management.

1 Consular assistance en-masse

Large-scale consular emergencies present governments with a multi-national and multi-agency setting, uncertainty, media scrutiny, significant time pressures and external threats to their own citizens. There is increasing expectation and pressure on foreign ministries to assist citizens rapidly and effectively in the event of a terrorist attack, natural disaster, or incident of civil or political unrest abroad. The central research
question underpinning this study is: what role does government play in consular emergencies? This may seem obvious considering that ‘consular’ is a governmental concept. But there has been little consolidated inquiry into the internal functioning of government and the role of foreign governments in a government’s consular operations. There are a number of ways in which one could approach the question of what role government plays in responding to consular emergencies. There is the normative question – the extent to which government should respond. This questions the extent and limits of citizens’ responsibilities for themselves while abroad, and whether taxpayer dollars should be spent on an extensive consular response. The other side of the coin is the capacity to respond – the role that government does play – the barriers and enablers of an effective response. The latter is the focus of this paper. As such, to better understand the role governments play and the limits and opportunities present in the response, the paper considered how governments coordinate and cooperate internally and externally to assist citizens. The paper employed an organising perspective, which was used to consider government actions through the lens of four key coordination and cooperation relationships within and between governments.

2 Framework and method

There has been a growth in recent years of political science and public administration literature on consular affairs (see, especially, Dickie, 2007; Lindström, 2009; Okano-Heijmans, 2010) and studies on the current position and future of consular services in Europe and the European Union (see, for example, Fernández, 2008; Jones-Bos and van Daalen, 2008; Porzio, 2008). The consular facet of major disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami has led to a number of studies relevant to consular affairs (see, for example, on tsunami crisis communication: Kivikuru, 2006; Strömback and Nord, 2006; Scanlon, 2007; Brändström et al., 2008). The difficulty of crisis coordination and cooperation at an interdepartmental and/or intergovernmental level has been acknowledged in a range of literature in the fields of emergency management and public administration (see, especially, Axelrod, 1984; Drabek, 1985; Mushkatel and Weschler, 1985; Rosenthal et al., 1991; Schneider, 1992; Granot, 1997; Rosenthal and Kouzmin, 1997; Hillyard, 2000; Boin et al., 2005; Kapucu, 2006; Waugh and Streib, 2006; Drennan and McConnell, 2007; Hicklin et al., 2009; Svedin, 2009), including the problems of crisis coordination at a supranational level, particularly among EU member states (see, for example, Wagner, 2003; Boin and Rhinard, 2008; Olsson, 2009; Ödlund, 2010). Coordination and cooperation are crucial to any emergency response, but in the theoretical or academic study of emergency management these terms have a variety of meanings. This paper takes coordination to be the organisation or integration of two parties’ operations to augment and improve the response; and cooperation to imply responding parties working in mutual assistance when appropriate, but without active integration of operations. Nonetheless, in practice there may be little distinction between coordination, cooperation, coercion, collaboration or contracting.

A 'structured and focused' comparative approach was utilised in this study (see George and Bennett, 2005, especially pp.67–72). The ‘structure’ was provided by three foreign ministries’ consular responses (Australia, Sweden and the UK) to three large-scale events. In the 2002 Bali nightclub bombing, 202 individuals died. More than 150 were foreign nationals, including 88 Australian citizens, more than 20 British
citizens and five Swedish citizens (ABC, 2003). In the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, more than 40 countries lost citizens (Telford and Cosgrave, 2006, pp.33, 46) and more than 20,000 Swedish citizens, 10,000 British citizens and 5000 Australian citizens were initially estimated to be in affected areas. Among the deceased were nearly 550 Swedish citizens, more than 150 British citizens and 26 Australian citizens, with countless more injured or missing. In July 2006, war between Hezbollah and Israel threatened the safety of those remaining in Lebanon and led to some of the largest mass evacuations of recent history. The UK evacuated approximately 4600 individuals, Australia 5000, and Sweden evacuated 8400 individuals.

The three-by-three ‘incident-by-foreign ministry’ cases provided the ‘structure’. The ‘focus’ was provided by the organising perspective: four governmental coordination and cooperation relationships. Of these, two were areas of internal coordination: within the foreign ministry and coordination between government departments. Two were areas of external cooperation and collaboration with foreign governments: with the government of the directly impacted countries (the ‘host’ government) and between the governments of the countries responding to the consular emergency. The four relationships were chosen to allow for a specific focus on government. Despite the ‘comparative’ approach, this paper does not seek to label, assess or rank the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ of a government’s response as a whole, but rather to examine the methods employed during consular challenges such as evacuation, location of missing, assisting injured, supporting relatives or identification and repatriation of the deceased. Empirical material was obtained from government and independent incident inquiries and reviews, annual reports, parliamentary hearings, interview transcripts, as well as news and peer-reviewed journal articles by first responders and government officials and also contemporaneous news media reporting. Interviews by the author, with individuals previously or currently working with consular affairs in the three governments, were also conducted to verify or supplement information.

3 Intra-governmental coordination relationships

3.1 Coordination within the foreign ministry

One of the most challenging aspects of intra-departmental coordination in a consular emergency is the relationship between foreign ministry headquarters and its representatives abroad. An embassy or diplomatic post in the affected country means that the foreign ministry already has an established in-country base and knowledgeable people to lead the on-the-ground coordination. Even so, diplomatic posts generally operate with a small permanent staff. Of the five DFAT employees at Australia’s Beirut embassy, only two were in Lebanon when the conflict began in mid-July (Schwarz and McConnell, 2009, p.243). Even large embassies can be eclipsed by widespread events such as the tsunami, which spanned regional and remote areas in several countries. The highest-level representation in a region is the Ambassador or Consul-General whose rapid action and presence in an emergency is both commended and symbolically important; for example, within an hour of the bombing on Bali, the Australian Consul-General was on-site and in contact with the Ambassador in Jakarta (DFAT, 2003, p.126). During emergencies embassies become information hubs, yet the desire to react and seek out information and the need to maintain a fully functional post is a difficult balance to
strike. Following the tsunami, the UK Ambassador to Thailand left for Phuket with some embassy staff in a four-wheel-drive convoy. The London-based call centre was temporarily overloaded and within a day the British embassy in Bangkok received 6500 calls from within Thailand and the UK. Because these calls had to be ‘logged, sifted and actioned’, emails coming in from the badly hit region of Khao Lak remained unopened that day (NAO/FCO, 2005, pp.11, 12).

Large-scale emergencies often produce an insecure environment but necessitate rapid personnel reinforcements. While individuals or specialist teams from the foreign ministry can usually be deployed to the diplomatic post or affected region, concerns for personnel safety may slow the arrival of reinforcements. In mid-2006, Sweden did not have an embassy in Lebanon and while quickly recognising that reinforcements needed to be sent to Beirut, they were faced with continued concerns about the ‘security situation’ (MFA, 2006, p.7). The lack of a Swedish embassy in Lebanon also led to organisational confusion and problems with the division of responsibility. The reinforcements that were sent to Beirut were formally intended to be under the orders of the Swedish Ambassador in Damascus, accredited to both Syria and Lebanon, but ‘in practice the temporary Stockholm-based staff in Beirut maintained close and direct contact with the operative management in Stockholm’ (MFA, 2006, p.22). Reinforcements are an essential element of large-scale consular emergency response. However, this sudden deployment of personnel leads to questions of command and authority, and can cause confusion among the deployed, the receiving mission and the foreign ministry headquarters.

Each large-scale consular emergency is unique: the trigger for the emergency, the magnitude and scale of the event, the global as well as regional geography. This can delay deployment until the foreign ministry knows what resources are required. It is useful for foreign ministries to be able to deploy small teams at a very early stage for reconnaissance but also to establish a presence in the affected area until further reinforcements can arrive. The UK established Rapid Deployment Teams (RDT) that are Foreign and Commonwealth Office officers ‘with relevant skills, who are on standby in London (and Hong Kong) and available to travel anywhere in the world at short notice in the event of a crisis’ (NAO/FCO, 2005, pp.14–15). However, as circumstances surrounding an emergency can be complex and unclear in the first hours or days, areas of priority for rapid response teams may be difficult to identify in a widespread disaster such as the tsunami. The British RDT was sent from London to Sri Lanka on the day of the tsunami. Although reports of devastation coming out of Sri Lanka were accurate, it later emerged that the tsunami’s impact on Thailand had created a more dire need for reinforcement. This initial decision led to criticism of the FCO in a post-tsunami inquiry (NAO/FCO, 2005, p.15). In addition, there was a lack of understanding of intended command and control structures and questions remained over the RDT’s integration into the existing foreign ministry structure on-the-ground – whether the RDT was there to support or to take charge. By operating independently, and not seeking advice or assistance from foreign ministry staff already on the ground, opportunities to utilise local knowledge or contacts were missed (NAO/FCO, 2005, p.16).

Embassy personnel and other first responders from the foreign ministry are dependent on the headquarters for two types of rapid reinforcement: personnel reinforcements sent to the disaster site, as well as personnel and technological reinforcements at domestic call centres to relieve phone call pressure on embassies. Furthermore, because these reinforcements take time to establish, they need to be activated at the earliest possible moment, often before it is clear how many may be affected in the consular facet of the
disaster. Headquarters relies on on-site responders to remain in contact or contactable in conditions that may be marked by damaged or overloaded telecommunication infrastructure. Furthermore, an on-the-ground responder may also be inundated with calls on their mobile phone (or phones) from other actors: their team, their local contacts or reporters. Foreign ministry headquarters also rely on on-the-ground responders to use their best judgement to make on-the-spot decisions and to provide their most accurate assessment of the conditions, especially as the news media may be favouring individual stories or visually dramatic material. Given that geographical distance and internationalisation of the consular response lends itself to decentralisation of authority, coordination relationships within the ministry are characterised by reliance and trust, particularly between responders at the headquarters and on the ground.

3.2 Interdepartmental coordination

The difficulty of facilitating a whole-of-government response during emergencies is a well-established and much-discussed problem in the academic literature (see, for example, Petak, 1985). The foreign ministry is designated the lead department for consular emergency response as the disaster is located abroad. Although consular matters remain within the foreign ministry’s realm, two issues arise with this structure. First, unlike other foreign emergencies, the consular emergency is between the government and its citizens giving it a greater domestic focus. Secondly, foreign ministries do not have the influence or resources of other departments or agencies, such as police or defence, which may already have developed close relations with their foreign governmental counterparts. For example, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) already had an established relationship with Indonesia’s police force at the time of the bombings on Bali (DFAT, 2003, p.87). Following the bombings, the UK police force made an important contribution to the consular response by assigning Family Liaison Officers (FLO) to act as a single contact point for families with deceased or missing relatives. In the tsunami aftermath, the FCO ‘co-ordinated with the Metropolitan Police [in] the deployment of over 300 police family liaison officers – the largest deployment ever’ (FCO, 2005, p.171).

Even with a designated ‘lead department’, agencies that are normally fairly autonomous will not necessarily wait to have their assistance requested, as seen in the Australian Air Force’s independent decision following the bombings on Bali. ‘CNN and other media began broadcasting news of the explosions...Throughout the entire preparatory phase, however, no additional information was received from higher command levels in the military hierarchy. The air force itself decided what should be done and launched their own operation’ (Brolén et al., 2007, pp.57–58). Conversely, departments may already be responding to another facet of the disaster such as humanitarian relief, and may not have an instinctive understanding of their role in a consular response. As such, various systems of government-wide coordination in response to foreign emergencies exist.

Australia convened the Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF) 19 times during the Bali bombings response (DFAT, 2003, p.138) and instituted two parallel coordination processes (or ‘hubs’), rather than one overarching interdepartmental response. The foreign ministry (DFAT) coordinated the government response in the international acute phase and FaCS (Family and Community Services) coordinated departments in the domestic response and recovery phase (Management Advisory
Committee, 2004, p.193). However, even with a government-wide coordination taskforce, seemingly relevant agencies, such as Emergency Management Australia, were not sure where they fitted into the response (Brolén et al., 2007, p.55). Furthermore, communication issues between the international and domestic ‘hubs’ remained. The then deputy secretary of FaCS noted that the state health departments were ‘ready to leap into action on their plans, but no-one was “switching them on” because the international side did not automatically switch on the domestic side’; and ‘partly because of the security around DFAT’s system [communication] came down to face-to-face meetings and hard copy’ (Paul, 2005, p.32).

Interdisciplinary or multi-agency teams are another available tool for governments during a consular emergency. The Swedish Response Team (SRT) activated by the Swedish Rescue Services Agency (when commissioned by the foreign ministry) supplements foreign ministry staff on-the-ground with personnel from the Swedish Rescue Services Agency, the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Police Board (Kulling and Sigurdsson, 2008, p.12). Likewise, the Australian Emergency Response Teams (ERT) comprised DFAT officials but also, for instance after the tsunami, included ‘Australian Federal Police expertise in forensics and disaster victim identification [and] a medical team and counsellors from Centrelink’ (DFAT, 2005, p.152). ‘Australian Defence Force linguists and logistics specialists were assigned to the team, and a chaplain and DFAT doctor [were] subsequently added’ (Paterson, 2006, p.5).

A number of interdepartmental coordination issues were identified by the Swedish Tsunami Commission, in particular ‘leadership relations’ between the foreign ministry and the government offices. Moreover, within the foreign ministry, the commission concluded that ‘there appears to have been uncertainty about who is the most senior executive with operative responsibility for crisis efforts of the kind that became necessary – the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs or the Director-General for Administrative Affairs. Most people seem to have considered the State Secretary should obviously have this role, but he had a different perception of his role’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005, p.513). The evacuation from Lebanon demonstrated concerted efforts to alleviate confusion by instituting the Emergency Management Group, which was to be convened and chaired by the foreign ministry’s Director-General for Consular Affairs ‘in the event of serious consular crises or major disaster situations abroad’ (MFA, 2006, p.4).

In consular emergencies, government departments are expected to work together while facing pressure to respond rapidly and coherently. It may not seem obvious to one arm of government that they will be needed in the consular response, particularly if already engaged in the humanitarian response. Government departments may not have the same processes, systems or modes of functioning, which can lead to clashes and misunderstandings. It is not simply a matter of entire sections from various departments collaborating, but also individuals from a wide range of departments that suddenly find themselves grouped together in a foreign ministry led response team, such as the RDT, SRT or ERT. For Australia, the response to the Bali bombings brought to the fore a number of issues present in interdepartmental coordination: from questions of authority and responsibility, to inoperability of departments’ communication technology. However, in the immediate aftermath, a great deal of thought was given to the role that the foreign ministry and other departments or agencies played in the consular response. It has been suggested that this reflection resulted in a much more rapid and natural coordination relationship at the beginning of the tsunami response (Shergold, 2005, p.48). The
interdepartmental coordination relationship can be characterised as one of confusion but also familiarisation and learning. The coordination relationship benefited greatly from experience with previous emergencies in which the departments became familiar with each others’ potential contributions. For departments other than the foreign ministry the challenge was to actively learn to work with consular affairs and recognise the pragmatic compassion that is required when dealing with consular cases. But in turn, it was important for the foreign ministry to recognise and capitalise on existing relations between other departments and their counterparts abroad, as well as existing structures and systems, such as FLOs, that could be used to great effect during a large-scale consular incident.

4 Inter-governmental coordination relationships

4.1 Coordination with the ‘host’ government(s)

When a country is directly impacted by a terrorist attack, a natural disaster or civil unrest, the government has to manage distressed citizens, the economic impact, infrastructure losses and scrutiny over preparedness and recovery. The government is also forced to coordinate with numerous foreign governments and a multitude of other actors. The Australian Government’s prior working relationship with the Indonesian Government made coordination easier following the Bali bombings. However, the Indonesian Government specifically requested AFP and Australian Security Intelligence Organisation assistance with the response (Burgess, 2002, p.6). Despite the foreign ministry’s role as designated lead department, increased internationalisation of government departments and agencies means that foreign governments may prefer to coordinate with those with which they are most familiar.

Differences in protocol, standards or traditions or the lack of control over another government’s personnel can cause frustration and confusion in an international crisis situation. Scanlon et al. (2007, p.86) described how ‘new facilities for processing the tsunami dead in Thailand could not be used until they were blessed by Buddhist monks [and the deceased were not] transferred to the morgue because it would disturb the spirits, which Buddhists believe are still in the bodies’. Widely publicised rumours that foreign tourists were being cremated or buried in mass graves caused such concern abroad that diplomats from several foreign ministries had to reassure the public and media that the Thai Government had given their assurances that this would not occur (see, for example, Agence France Presse, 2005).

The devastation associated with a disaster often causes foreign governments to extend their response to both the consular and the humanitarian facet of the disaster. However, the consular and humanitarian operations can easily overlap and result in a contentious issue of foreign governments prioritising their own nationals (or even foreign nationals in general) over the local population (in reference to the Bali bombings see Saunders and Powell, 2002; in reference to the tsunami see Lennquist and Hodgetts, 2005, p.32). In response, foreign government officials draw attention to the assistance given to the local population, such as the Australian Foreign Minister who announced the evacuation of injured Indonesian citizens to Australia to receive medical treatment following the Bali bombing (Saunders and Powell, 2002).
In 2006, Lebanon was the location of the emergency, but because evacuees could not be flown directly to Australia, it was the surrounding governments that proved to be the necessary targets of coordination and cooperation. ‘This involved negotiating the co-operation of such countries as Syria, Jordan, Cyprus and Turkey to receive the evacuees, and temporarily accommodate them pending their onward movement. Without that co-operation, an evacuation of this size would have been very difficult, probably impossible’ (Dudgeon, 2006, p.23). During the evacuations, the most important coordination relationship was with Israel. In order to ensure the safe passage of evacuees through the war zone it was necessary for foreign governments to inform Israel of their movements and negotiate windows of time in which evacuees could be moved. Diplomatic coordination efforts were not always successful. The Australian Foreign Minister said that he had requested ‘a short ceasefire in order to enable our nationals and other foreign nationals to get out of southern Lebanon...The Israelis have so far said that this was a war zone, that they wouldn’t agree to our requests’ (Downer, 2006). The Swedish authorities were provided with ‘verbal assurances that no military attacks would be made along the planned route’ (Kulling and Sigurðsson, 2008, pp.32–33). But as the British Ambassador to Lebanon noted, the designated periods of safe passage were strictly enforced by Israel and ‘if they say you have a window, that’s it’ (quoted in Whitaker, 2006). Simultaneous diplomatic discussions with multiple ‘host’ or neighbouring governments are a feature of large-scale consular emergency, and at times, essential to the safety of citizens.

The need for effective coordination between the foreign ministry of the responding country and the government of the directly affected country can be seen at many levels; at the ground level – between responders, representatives and officials of each government; and at a senior level – diplomatic negotiations and communication allow for coordinated action ensuring the safe passage of evacuees and for a foreign government to operate within the borders of a sovereign power. These relationships are intertwined, as misunderstandings or frustration (or good-willed collaboration) on-the-ground can filter into the diplomatic negotiations and state-level coordination. Furthermore, large-scale disasters that result in a consular emergency for one foreign country will likely result in consular emergencies for a number of other foreign countries as well. As such, there is a great deal of pressure on governments of the directly impacted countries. The coordination relationships between governments responding to their respective consular emergencies and the government of the country directly impacted can be characterised by diplomacy – balancing a respect for the protocol, processes or traditions of a differing system, with pressure to assist one’s own citizens in another’s sovereign territory.

4.2 Coordination between responding governments

Large-scale consular emergencies affect nationals from a number of foreign countries. There are differences in numbers affected and geography, but foreign governments have similar consular emergency response goals and benefit from coordination and cooperation with other responding governments. Formal and informal consular agreements exist between governments, bilaterally and among groups, such as the EU member states. These agreements are intended for individual or small-scale consular cases. Nonetheless, all three events demonstrated many instances of ad hoc bilateral coordination and cooperation. Bilateral cooperation was particularly useful in the evacuation of citizens to an intermediary evacuation point, such as Cyprus during the
evacuations from Lebanon (see WorldReach, 2007) and in the handling and identification of the deceased following Bali, but on a larger scale following the tsunami (see Scanlon, 2006; Scanlon et al., 2007).

Bilateral cooperation is particularly useful when a government does not have an embassy in the affected region. In mid-2006, Australia did not have an embassy in Syria and was evacuating citizens to Jordan because ‘administering in-coming evacuees could be more easily arranged from the nearest capital where [DFAT] did have a mission’ (Dudgeon, 2006, p.24). However, bilateral cooperation with Canada allowed DFAT employees from the Cairo embassy to co-locate at the Canadian embassy in Damascus, work out of a key strategic base, and ‘supervise the transit of evacuees through Syria’ (Dudgeon, 2006, p.24). When responding to a consular emergency in another country, it may not be possible for a government to make use of its own resources. Private resources then have to be acquired on the ground. This became a problem during the Lebanon evacuations. There was insufficient coordination and communication between responding governments and, as a result, valuable response time and taxpayer funds were being used to compete and bid for the same vessels, busses and accommodation. At one point, Canada and Australia were bidding on the same privately owned vessel which both believed they had successfully secured (ABC, 2006; Di Nino and Stollery, 2007, p. 19).

A study of the multi-national evacuations from Lebanon found that although ‘some national governments offered space on boats and planes to non-citizens...these governments were often not able to offer detailed information on these citizens...for the receiving party’ (WorldReach, 2007, p.4). As such, even when ad hoc bilateral cooperation allows for assistance to be offered to foreign nationals, consular officials may be preoccupied processing and assisting their own citizens. The issue of handling other governments’ nationals can continue even when the evacuation is complete, especially when the laws and regulations of different countries are taken into account. For example, in 2002 after a Swedish citizen had been evacuated from Bali to Australia, strict Australian privacy laws impeded staff from the Swedish embassy in their search for the hospitalised individual (Brolén et al., 2007, p.53). Foreign governments located in the same part of the world, such as the Scandinavian countries, were also able to evacuate each other’s nationals back to Scandinavia and then transfer them on to a specific country. Following the tsunami, there were Danish and Norwegian embassy personnel waiting at the crisis centre in Stockholm’s Arlanda airport for flights coming in from Thailand (Disaster Medicine Study Organisation, 2008, pp.18, 27); and again during the evacuations from Lebanon, Swedish embassy staff met citizens at Copenhagen and Oslo airports (MFA, 2006, p.26).

The Swedish Tsunami Commission identified that rather than EU coordination of consular operations, ‘informal networks between nations appear to be the main complement to national emergency preparedness’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005, p.534). Early in the evacuations from Lebanon, a joint EU response was discussed but according to the Swedish foreign ministry, this ‘did not produce any concrete results’ (MFA, 2006, pp.23–24). Again during the Lebanon evacuations, the preference for a Nordic rather than EU response was expressed by the Swedish foreign ministry for the reason that ‘the Nordic countries work with a different circle to protect than many other European countries. Under Swedish rules, in addition to citizenship, it is permanent residence – settlement – in the country that in most cases is decisive for the right to different kinds of consular support. Many other EU countries link that right exclusively to citizenship’ (MFA, 2006, pp.23–24).
Nonetheless, there were aspects of ‘European’ (EU member states plus Norway) coordination that were commended. The FCO noted the usefulness of daily conference calls between European crisis managers following the tsunami (NAO/FCO, 2005, p.21). This communication was re-established during the Lebanon evacuations. Holding the EU presidency in July 2006, the Finnish Government arranged ‘virtual meetings’. These were described by the Swedish foreign ministry as ‘the most important channel for exchanges of information between the member states’ (MFA, 2006, p.23). With the groundwork for European cooperation already laid, there have been discussions of how this could be applied to the consular realm (European Commission, 2006). However, there may be a practical limit to cooperation. While coordinating 27 member states in the middle of a war zone may be too complicated, it is possible to share information and maintain communication through regular conference calls. Through this, governments can establish and coordinate bilateral on-the-ground operations and stay informed in a changing environment.

Consular cooperation between foreign ministries can be of great use, particularly when one is geographically closer to the disaster site. However, consular assistance remains entirely the responsibility of the state. Given the lack of control that one party has over the other’s actions, it may be advantageous to prioritise other more self-sufficient methods of offsetting the geographical distance, for example positioning trained personnel at geographically strategic points, such as the UK’s RDTs, positioned in both London and Hong Kong, or having prepared kits at the ready to reduce deployment time. For example, Australia’s ‘post-in-a-box’ can be deployed from Canberra, Washington DC and London (DFAT, 2008, pp.142, 175). Coordination between responding countries can be characterised as one of good will and strategic cooperation where feasible, but primarily pragmatic prioritisation of a rapid state-focused consular emergency response.

5 The consequence of government coordination for citizens in distress

Although ad hoc incidents of coordination and cooperation and general good will are widely reported, this does not happen naturally on a large scale. Foreign ministries and governments were scrutinised following each event and criticised for missed opportunities or for poor planning, implementation or learning. Effective coordination and cooperation can alleviate citizens’ distress. When ineffective or non-existent, time, money and potentially lives are lost. Because it is a consular emergency, the target of the response is a government’s own citizens and as such internal coordination and cooperation is stretched beyond national borders. This presents challenges of distance, less autonomy or control over resources, a greater number of foreign actors and different or altered roles for domestic actors. This paper used a structure of three foreign ministries’ responses to three consular emergencies and a focus on internal and external government coordination relationships to highlight the role that ‘government’ and governments play in a large-scale consular emergency.

While coordination and cooperation may seem like an operational and logistical issue, there is public and media pressure on politicians and the government during these events to demonstrate that they are assisting citizens, and with video cameras and reporters on the ground there is a need to demonstrate a presence. Even when it makes more sense logistically to share resources, or to make use of other responding countries’
personnel and vessels, this may not be the best move from a public relations standpoint. Particularly as individuals have criticised their government in their national media, when they have received assistance, but received it from a different responding government. The cooperation between responding governments may relieve pressure on consular staff on the ground, but result in increased pressure and criticism later on. For the media, a government abandoning its citizens in great distress is an appealing narrative to run with. But for politicians this symbolic aspect of the consular response can be a very powerful motivator and at times hinders the logistical response. Furthermore, large-scale emergencies, while now part of the job description for consular services, are not the primary or day-to-day task. On the scale which requires a whole-of-government response, these emergencies may only occur once every couple of years.

The need for confidence in decentralised authority and communication between geographically disparate responders is paramount in intra-governmental coordination, as well as clear articulation of roles and responsibilities to avoid overlap or gaps. This is especially important when the foreign ministry and broader government are already responding to other facets of the disaster, such as humanitarian relief. But as departments become more familiar with what skills and resources other departments can bring to the table, the coordination becomes increasingly natural and leads to more formalised intra-governmental cooperation such as in the multi-departmental response groups. Familiarity and communication can be established through continued efforts of pre-emergency networking and by increasing contact and collaboration within government and between governments.

From a government’s perspective, there is a need to assist citizens but often little disadvantage in assisting citizens of other countries at the same time. It may not be pragmatic to attempt to separate citizens for evacuation or assistance, and it also shows good will. Cooperation can be logistically advantageous for both governments. But it may not be politically advantageous for one of the parties, given that consular affairs remain within the sphere of state responsibility and there may be political pressure on governments to assist their own citizens as rapidly as possible. In inter-governmental coordination relationships, formal consular agreements can allow for an understanding of what assets, resources, skills or knowledge each partner brings to the relationship, but it may be simply more beneficial to be aware of each other’s areas of influence and identify opportunities for mutual assistance. This means that communication between states prior to and during an emergency is the key to identifying areas where collaboration is mutually beneficial and also to reduce the chances of a third party taking advantage of competition between responders. Pre-emergency networking already occurs among groups of consular sections, as seen in the consular cooperation working party of European Union member states (COCON), or the ‘consular colloque’ of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and United States, which meets annually to discuss consular matters. Without needing to draw up formal agreements relating to large-scale consular emergencies, this networking promotes familiarity and communication (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2010, p.75). This reflects the idea that when preparing for emergencies, the process of ‘planning’ is more desirable than specific ‘plans’.

In a consular emergency, there are a significant number of actors and organisations with which the government may interact, such as NGOs, the UN, volunteers, community and lobby groups, private industry and the news media. The basic organising perspective used in this paper was, by necessity, limited. It provided a snapshot that does not claim to capture the whole process of consular response. It did not include some crucial
relationships, such as engagement with volunteers who play important first responder and boots-on-the-ground roles, or with private industry that brings specialist expertise, such as Kenyon International, or airlines and travel companies that have in the past played an important role in easing consular responsibility for government. Instead, the organising perspective can be used to spotlight the role of government. This spotlight is needed, not because government is ignored in consular emergencies (consular by definition is governmental), but rather it allows for a more distinct breakdown of the key intra- and inter-governmental relationships. By separating the governmental relationships, it is also possible to identify and elucidate the associative tasks and issues that arise during the management of the acute phase of a consular emergency. In doing so, this paper demonstrated that while there is a highly valuable aptitude for coordination in and between governments, there are considerable barriers to effective coordination implementation during consular emergencies.

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References


Coping with consular emergencies


Coping with consular emergencies


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Distance and Displacement in Consular Emergencies: Assisting National Citizens in Distress Abroad
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Abstract: When a large number of tourists or travellers are affected by a disaster while abroad, there is pressure on governments to respond and provide consular assistance to their citizens – to engage in 'remote crisis management'. However, the foreign ministry response is both facilitated and further complicated by the international nature of the response. This article seeks to examine the challenges of consular emergency management by exploring two manifestations of 'remote' in remote crisis management. Using case studies of three foreign ministries' responses to three large-scale consular emergencies this article examines the logistical and practical issues of access, infrastructure, and resources; and the psychological and cognitive nature of connectedness and remoteness. This article argues firstly, because the consular emergency is viewed as a national or 'domestic' emergency (between a government and its citizens), this produces a state-focused response, thereby missing opportunities presented by the international context of the operation. Secondly, it argues that the psychological and cognitive manifestations of distance further discourage internationalisation of consular emergency responses.

Keywords: Consular Affairs, Crisis Management, Distance, Displacement, Foreign Ministry

Introduction: Large-scale Consular Emergencies

Consular assistance is the support provided to citizens while they are abroad, usually by their nearest embassy or by the consular services section of their foreign ministry. Although demand for consular services has increased as more individuals are travelling abroad, the budget for consular services has not grown to match this increase (Broadbent et al., 2009: 27). The pressure on consular services is particularly acute when a large number of foreign nationals, such as tourists, travellers or expatriates, are caught up in a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, or political unrest while abroad. The internationalisation of the emergency and the large number of individuals with varying needs for assistance poses a significant challenge for their government, particularly the foreign ministry. While attempting to provide a high quality service for individuals or families that require a great deal of time and sensitivity, personnel and resources stretch among the many that require assistance.

Drennan and McConnell (2007: 214-17) describe this government response to large-scale consular emergencies as 'remote crisis management' or 'managing crises from afar'. 'High media and citizen expectations that leaders should “know what is going on” are coupled with expectations that action will be swift and effective' (2007: 214). Media pressure and expectations of rapid and decisive action are hallmarks of public crisis management (see Boin et al., 2005). But there are particular features of consular emergencies that make them an interesting category of emergency to study. The disaster or conflict is located abroad, but because it is a consular emergency the response seeks to assist national citizens affected.
abroad but also distressed relatives back home. In essence, it is a national or ‘domestic’ emergency, an emergency between a government and its citizens, which is played out in the international arena. Those working with consular services routinely contend with international issues of diplomacy, sovereignty and citizenship. In consular emergencies they are also contending with the three features of crisis: threat, uncertainty and urgency (Boin et al., 2005: 2). As such, this concept of ‘remote’ deserves closer treatment.

This article seeks to better understand the challenges of consular emergency management by pursuing a basic framework with which to view the constituent components of the concept of ‘remote’ in consular emergencies. It argues that there is a state-centric nature to consular responses - a state-focused perspective with which response operations are conducted. While support is provided for those citizens requiring assistance, opportunities presented by the international context of the response are missed. Further to this, the article argues that the psychological and cognitive manifestations of distance further discourage internationalisation of consular emergency responses. A more nuanced understanding of consular emergencies, especially the nexus of domestic and foreign relationships with global and local interactions, would benefit practitioners dealing with consular affairs, and also social scientists interested in global studies and public crisis management.

Background and Framework

In recent years, there has been an increase in academic literature within the social sciences on consular services and government responses to consular emergencies. There has been a particular focus on the current position and future of consular services in Europe and the European Union (see for example, Fernandez, 2008; Jones-Bos and van Daalen, 2008; Porzio, 2008; Lindström, 2009), although, the broader ideas of how consular services engage with the public has also received treatment (see especially, Dickie, 2007; Okano-Heijmans, 2010). Major consular events have spawned case studies of consular activities that are useful in the broader study of consular affairs (see for example, the academic work done on the international tsunami response by Scanlon and colleagues at Carlton University: Scanlon, 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Scanlon et al., 2007). Case studies in the literature reflect the regions or countries that were impacted greatly. This trend can be seen in Australia following the Bali bombings (for example, Southwick et al., 2002; Watts, 2002; Taylor et al., 2003; Leggat and Leggat, 2004; Paul, 2004; Cook et al., 2006; Roach and Kemish, 2006; West, 2008); from Australia and Canada following the Lebanon evacuations (Schwarz and McConnell, 2009; Nyers, 2010); and from the Nordic countries following the tsunami disaster (see for example, Kivikuru, 2006; Strömbäck and Nord, 2006; Björnsson et al., 2008; Brändström et al., 2008; Råholm et al., 2008; Västfjäll et al., 2008; Thoresen et al., 2009).

It is possible to break down the concept of ‘remote’ into two constituent parts. To help conceptualise ‘remoteness’, this article borrowed from physics the pair of concepts: ‘distance’ and ‘displacement’. Distance is the length of the actual real-world path one has to take to move from point A to point B, while displacement is the theoretical interval of difference between point A and point B. Translating this to the realm of consular affairs: ‘distance’ is the physical, practical, logistical facet of remoteness – the physical connectedness of two places, the time it takes to get from one to the other, the number of flights between the two, the ease with which individuals in each place can communicate. Displacement, on the other hand, is the psychological and cognitive facet of distance. It is the stark difference between
place A and place B, regardless of geography. For example, a place that is geographically distant may not be perceived as ‘remote’ if there is greater familiarity and pre-existing links. Conversely, a place that is geographically close may feel more remote if culturally unfamiliar or distinct in language or customs.

In the following three sections, this article seeks to examine this concept of ‘remote’ and its implications in crisis management. If we begin with the notion that consular emergencies are akin to domestic emergencies, albeit not contained within national borders, then it is worth devoting the first section to grounding the concept of consular emergencies in the ideas of globalisation and the state. Thus setting the stage for the further two sections, which explore in turn, two ways to think about ‘remote’ – as an objective concept (distance), and a subjective concept (displacement).

To better understand the concept of remoteness and the interaction between the citizen, the state, and the international arena during consular emergencies, this article utilised case studies of three foreign ministries’ responses (Australia, the United Kingdom, and Sweden) to three large-scale consular emergencies. The 2002 Bali nightclub bombings killed 202 individuals (ABC, 18 Feb. 2003). More than 150 of these individuals were from 20 foreign countries, including five Swedish, 26 British, and 88 Australian citizens. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami left individuals from more than 40 countries dead (Telford and Cosgrave, 2006: 33, 46), including approximately 26 Australian, 150 British and 550 Swedish citizens. Hundreds more were missing or injured, and thousands sought evacuation. The mid-2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah led to the evacuation of tens of thousands of foreign nationals of more than a dozen countries (BBC, 25 Jul. 2006). There were an estimated 7000 Swedish citizens in Lebanon, nearly all of whom were evacuated. Approximately 5000 Australians and 4000 British citizens were evacuated, each country having an estimated 20,000 citizens in Lebanon. (Note: figures are approximate. Discrepancies may reflect differing criteria of inclusion in, or exclusion from, the data. For instance, dual-nationals or permanent residents that are either included in more than one category or not recorded; or individuals that are missing but presumed dead).

Including nine cases in a three-by-three design allowed for combinations of within-case and between-case comparisons (George and Bennett, 2005: 179). This allowed for consideration of a wider spectrum of experiences, which was beneficial as even with the same trigger (for example, a tsunami) the magnitude of each foreign government’s consular emergency differed, even though they possessed the same goal of assisting their own citizens. Sources used for this study included interviews, government and independent inquiries, reviews and reports that were produced following each incident, general consular reviews and annual reports and policy documents from the three case-countries, as well as carefully selected media produced at the time or soon after each event.

Globalisation and the State in Consular Emergencies

Global interconnectedness has changed the way citizens travel and communicate internationally, and also how a government responds to a large-scale emergency in another part of the world. Nonetheless, such emergencies also highlight the continued prominence of the state, demonstrated by states’ cooperation and competition in the process of assisting citizens, and in the reactions of vulnerable citizens in the aftermath of a disaster. To better understand the pressure points that arise when a national or domestic emergency is globalised, this section
considers the roles that globalisation and the state system play in these large-scale consular emergencies.

What is meant by globalisation in this context? Although the movement of travellers and establishment of expatriate communities involves many manifestations of globalisation (including economic, societal, cultural, technological), this article focuses on the open borders and removal of barriers that encourage international travel as an alternative to domestic travel. For example, cheaper airfares and the rise of budget airlines facilitate the movement of tourists and seasonal or en-masse holiday movement. As tourists from one country establish a presence in a section of another, this encourages compatriots to visit, knowing that they can find many of the comforts of home. Thailand, as a popular winter destination for Sweden’s citizens (see Le Fevre, 18 Feb. 2010), had an estimated 20,000 Swedes visiting in December 2004. Sweden lost more than 500 citizens when the tsunami struck. However, with many Australians enjoying a summer Christmas at home the number of Australians killed was far fewer. Yet, two years earlier in the Bali nightclub bombings, Australia lost more citizens than any other country including Indonesia, as Bali - Kuta beach in particular - has long been popular with Australians (Hussey, 1989: 315-16).

The information flows during a consular emergency are an excellent example of the connectedness of individuals around the globe through personal communication, international news media, and the internet. Advances in technology and telecommunication means that images and news of an incident can be rapidly broadcast on both satellite news and domestic news (see for example, Gordon, 2007). The Swedish Embassy in Jakarta learned of the bomb attack on Bali when a reporter for a Swedish tabloid called to confirm the incident after it had appeared on a newswire (Brolen et al., 2007: 83). This increases public pressure on foreign ministries to act rapidly as the international media compares the consular responses regardless of differing factors such as numbers of nationals affected, geography or capacity (WorldReach, 2007: 2). International news wire services published comparisons of numerous countries actions in the evacuations from Lebanon, which were picked up by domestic news outlets around the world (see for example, Agence France Presse, 21 Jul. 2006; Panossian [Associated Press], 21 Jul. 2006).

This highlights another issue: nationals from a number of countries are affected in a large-scale consular emergency, leading to a situation in which consular officials from multiple countries are operating in the same disaster zone. The presence of numerous foreign governments can both help and hinder the response, as they have differing capabilities and needs but essentially the same goal of assisting nationals through locating the missing, evacuation, or victim identification. On the one hand, following the tsunami, there was unprecedented cooperation and coordination between foreign governments on the ground in Thailand to complete the massive task of Disaster Victim Identification (Scanlon, 2006). On the other hand, the presence of multiple responding governments can lead to confusion and unproductive competition to acquire scarce resources. For example, during the Lebanon evacuations Canada and Australia spent valuable time and money outbidding each other for a ship, both believing that they had secured the vessel (ABC, 19 Jul. 2006; Di Nino and Stollery, 2007: 19).

Although the processes of globalisation contribute to the convergence of tourists en-masse in a foreign destination, consular affairs remains very much in the realm of the state, with the explicit aim to assist one’s own national citizens. These large-scale consular emergencies highlight two features of the traditional state system: sovereignty, or the right of a state to
govern itself and determine its relations with other states; and citizenship, the legal notion of belonging to a state, being a national of that state. When citizens are in need of assistance in another country there is public and media pressure on governments to act. However, it is still considered diplomatic protocol for government officials to respect the sovereignty of other international actors, particularly their immigration laws or conventions, even if this limits or hinders the emergency response. Providing a reason why military resources were not used as part of the consular response to the tsunami, the UK Ministry of Defence cited the ‘well established procedure’ of not deploying military resources into other sovereign territory in order to evacuate British nationals, except during armed conflict or threat of conflict (NAO and FCO, 2005: 23).

Complications arise when families of mixed citizenship understandably wish to be evacuated together (WorldReach, 2007: 2-3), or when dual-citizens wish to be evacuated between the two states in which they have citizenship (for the debate on Canadian-Lebanese citizenship following the evacuations see Nyers, 2010). Furthermore, even among the EU member states there is inconsistency regarding eligibility for consular assistance. A shared understanding that permanent residents have the same rights to consular assistance as full citizens is one of the reasons that the Swedish Foreign Ministry gave for favouring cooperation with Nordic countries over broader EU cooperation (MFA Sweden, 2006: 24).

Consular policy remains a national, not an international, issue. These national lines can be seen in the consular response to emergencies. Although it would take a significant change in laws and attitudes to de-nationalise or internationalise consular services, there are trends towards more integrated and communicative foreign ministries and consular services. The EU member states are a natural focal point given the integration groundwork already laid (see further, European Commission, 2006). However, small groupings such as the Nordic countries may be more realistic, given similarities, such as the shared perspective on residency and citizenship. Alongside formal agreements there is also benefit in pre-emergency networking to improve communication, cooperation and coordination during emergencies, seen in the ‘consular colloque’ of Australia, New Zealand, United States, UK, and Canada (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2010: 75). Despite noticeable changes in the way people travel and technological advances promoting increased connectedness, there remains the state – and citizenship as the continued link to that state while abroad. Large-scale consular emergencies can be seen as demonstrations of the forces and consequences of globalisation, but also very much an illustration of state-centric action.

**Distance in Consular Emergency Response: Access and Resources**

The previous section considered the stage on which remote crisis management takes place. This section is concerned with ‘distance’ - the physical, practical, logistical facet of remoteness in consular emergencies. For example, the geographical proximity between two countries, the accessibility of the disaster zone, the geographical spread or localisation of the disaster zone. The discussion first considers the infrastructure of connectedness and then considers the logistics and the practical hurdles of conducting an operation in a foreign country.

One way to conceive of physical distance is the infrastructure that allows for connectedness between two places, the resources that allow for easier access – the telecommunication infrastructure that is available, the number of flights between two places (or a secondary transit point), as well as the proximity of a country’s resources to the disaster zone. Amid disasters
there are often concerns that critical infrastructure will be compromised or disrupted (see Boin and McConnell, 2007). Early in the evacuation from Lebanon, the Beirut airport was rendered unusable due to the bombing occurring across the city. Mobile phone technology and global telecommunications play a significant part in consular emergency response – it can be a key tool for foreign ministries but also a cause of criticism. Following the Bali bombings, individuals who had contact with family members with mobile phones at the disaster site, called the information line at the Australian foreign ministry hoping for more details on the incident and the response. However, many were surprised to find that the operator had less information than the individual had obtained from their mobile phone contact with family members at the incident site (see for example, Bryden-Brown, 18 Oct. 2002). On the other hand, mobile technology allowed the Swedish government in conjunction with a Swedish mobile carrier to send urgent information by SMS en-masse to Swedish mobile phones in Lebanon during the evacuations (MFA Sweden, 2006: 32).

Another resource factor that affected the response in the three emergencies was whether the government responding to the consular emergency had its own resources within the affected area. Due to geographical proximity to Bali it was possible for Australia to use the Royal Australian Air Force for aeromedical evacuation directly to Royal Darwin Hospital and thereby, elicit more control over their resources (see Hampson et al., 2002). Conversely, during the Lebanon evacuations Australia did not have its own transport resources nearby and had to compete with other foreign governments for privately owned resources. The UK government, however, was able to maintain far more control over resources as there were British military bases on Cyprus, from which they could rapidly mobilise Royal Navy vessels and RAF Chinooks, and organise onward transport to the UK (Royal Navy, 21 Jul. 2006).

Distance in the logistical sense affects how easily a foreign ministry can get reinforcements in and citizens out. Despite technological advances, the geographical distances between countries remain - the time it takes to fly to the affected destination is still a factor in getting reinforcements in. News media may be inquiring about an incident within minutes of its occurrence and foreign ministry representatives may be onsite not long after that. For example, the Australian Consul-General was on the scene in Bali within half an hour of the incident (Gyngell and Wesley, 2007: 174). Yet, there remains pressure to have a substantial presence on the ground immediately. As the Australian ambassador to Lebanon in mid-2006 noted, one had to not only account for a 24 hour flying time but also the time it took to find suitable reinforcements and prepare them to deploy (Schwarz and McConnell, 2009: 243). Foreign ministries have instituted strategies to offset deployment and travel time for reinforcements. For example, Australia’s ‘post-in-a-box’: a portable ‘self-contained emergency communications system’ which is available for transport from Canberra, London and Washington D.C. (DFAT, 2008: 142, 175). To reduce response time the UK has posted its Rapid Deployment Teams not only in London, but also in Hong Kong (FCO, 2009: 4).

Despite technological advances there is a limit to the extent that technology can compensate for physical geography. There are two primary ways to mitigate the negative effects of distance, either by making resources and personnel more mobile to speed up deployment to the disaster site, or by permanently placing resources at strategic points around the globe. It is not feasible for even the more affluent or largest of countries to have resources such embassies in every country. But increased permanent resources at key points around the world can provide a small contingent to initiate an on the ground response until reinforcements arrive. Furthermore, fostering communication and consular cooperation between countries in very
different geographical locations (for example, Australia and the UK) can encourage collaboration when an emergency occurs near Europe or in the Asia Pacific region. Yet, the uncertainty of where the next emergency will occur and the demographics of the affected means that it is still highly problematic to rely on other countries’ resources as they may not have many nationals affected and thus not mount a significant consular response.

**Displacement in Consular Emergency Response: Psychological and Cognitive**

This section considers displacement - the psychological and cognitive facet of remoteness (and closeness) in consular emergencies. The need for assistance can be the result of a distressing circumstance for either affected citizens or their families. Distress can stem from the physical separation or disconnectedness from family and ‘the familiar’ and a sense of vulnerability in the unfamiliar or foreign environment. There is a psychological manifestation of remoteness caused by differences between two places, point A and point B. Conversely the distance may not seem so great with the emotional closeness that comes from familiarity despite geography. There is also the cognitive manifestation of remoteness which can be thought of as connectedness: as knowledge and understanding of point B, which comes from familiarity and similarity, or lack there-of.

When individuals are caught in a natural disaster, terrorist attack or warzone, this can cause a great deal of distress for the individual and for friends and relatives back home. There is an expectation of consular assistance that practical help is provided with compassion and support (see for example, NAO and Zito Trust, 2006). It is also a situation in which there are often far more individuals in need of assistance than consular officials available. As such, it is important to recognise that there are various factors associated with remoteness that can worsen the distress of being caught in a disaster. Feelings of displacement can be seen in the strength of survivors’ reactions to symbols and identifiers of ‘home’. Survivors of the tsunami reported a sense of relief when they saw an official with their national flag, or heard a familiar accent. For example, one British survivor recalled, ‘It was so lovely to see an English policeman. You suddenly felt safe’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 65). An Australian responder to the Bali nightclub bombings recalled ‘one man that said it was so good to hear an Aussie accent’ (Taylor et al., 2003: 6). However, there were also negative reactions when after finding the connection to home and the familiar, the expected compassion or comfort was not provided. Another survivor recalled ‘...there was a huge Union Jack at the back of the room and this really tall, official guy ... and it chokes me now because I just remember thinking thank God, somebody British who obviously knows and has come to rescue us and I made a right beeline for him and almost gave him a hug and he wasn’t having any of that, he was quite cold...’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 65).

In another manifestation of displacement, consular emergencies can bring to the fore an emotional link between point A and point B, essentially, a feeling of closeness despite physical distance. For dual nationals or frequent visitors there may be distress, not of unfamiliarity but of attachment. Of the Swedish experience evacuating from Lebanon, the National Board of Health and Welfare noted that ‘most people were relieved after they passed the border to Syria but many had left behind relatives in Lebanon and were of course worried about them’ (Kulling and Sigurdsson, 2008: 54). This emotional link between places may occur when individuals at home in the responding country do not personally know someone
affected, but know the places affected by the disaster. A Swedish reporter explained in the Australian press ‘Thailand is the second largest winter destination for Swedish travellers … so many Swedes know these places, have stayed in these hotels … readers say, “Hey I’ve been there, I’ve been on that beach”, so it becomes very emotional in that sense’. The familiarity and attachment to the place increases public interest in both the plight of fellow nationals affected, and the adequacy of the foreign ministry response (English and Coorey, 1 Jan. 2005).

Cognitive remoteness or closeness implies the (dis)connect in understanding or familiarity in working environment, bureaucracy, protocol or customs. For example, the Australian and Indonesian police already had experience working together in joint operations in Indonesia prior to the Bali bombings. This made it easier to utilise pre-existing links and cooperate in the immediate aftermath of the bombing (Brolén et al., 2007: 89). Similarly, the expatriate community can be engaged to help those who are unfamiliar with customs and traditions, navigate them at a difficult time or provide on-the-spot support. This may be ad hoc assistance, such as the Swedish expatriates on Cyprus who played an important role in the transit of evacuees from Lebanon to Sweden (Kulling and Sigurdsson, 2008: 56). Expatriates with an official role and existing relationship with the foreign ministry are also valuable, such as the British honorary consul and assistant honorary consul in Bali who were awarded OBEs for their exceptional response assisting British citizens affected by the bombing (BBC, 14 Jun. 2003).

Differences in protocol or procedure can also lead to tensions. For example, as Scanlon et al. (2007: 86) noted, ‘new facilities for processing the tsunami dead in Thailand could not be used until they were blessed by Buddhist monks [and bodies could not] be transferred to the morgue because it would disturb the spirits, which Buddhists believe are still in the bodies’. There were also rumours that foreign tourists were being cremated or buried in mass graves – concerns so widely publicised that several foreign ministries had their diplomats trying to assure the respective publics that this was not the case and that they had received assurances from the Thai government that this would not occur (see for example, Agence France Presse, 7 Jan. 2005). A language disconnect may be problematic during consular emergencies. As the Medical Expert Group noted in their report for the Swedish Tsunami Commission, although most doctors and nurses in Thai hospitals can speak English, ‘all Swedish citizens are not necessarily used to speaking English, even if they understand it’ (Lennquist and Hodgetts, 2005: 52).

Balancing pragmatic assistance with psychological support is a challenge in the consular response to a large-scale emergency. The practical and logistical response is a sizeable task, and indeed, a UK post-tsunami report found that initially most survivors primarily sought information and advice on ‘the most effective ways to search for missing loved ones, medical assistance, practical issues and getting home’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 25). But because the goal is broadly ‘assistance’ this incorporates an element of emotional support or compassion. While some travellers can get themselves out of difficulty, and some simply seek transport, others have difficulty with international travel or find it traumatic to leave what they felt to be a safe place. This may not be initially apparent to consular officials who are trying to organise the logistical side of the response for a large number of people, and are themselves, likely to be experienced travellers. The implication of neglecting the psychological facet of the consular response is distress persisting even after citizens arrive home.
Conclusion: The Challenge of En-masse Assistance beyond National Borders

This article aimed at the outset to establish how globalisation and the state system play into large-scale consular emergencies, and explore how ideas and realities of ‘remoteness’ (and conversely closeness, or connectedness) manifest in these emergencies. Predictably, there is no one truth for each emergency, each country, and (especially in relation to displacement) each individual. As consular affairs remains within the realm of the government and of the individual state, the cornerstones of state relations such as sovereignty and citizenship are understandably prevalent. A state-realm problem produces a state-centric response. There have been discussions of how consular affairs can move from the state’s realm to an international sphere, such as the EU (see for example, European Commission, 2006). However, for now the barriers of states, their autonomy to make consular laws or consular policy, as well as the problem of sharing the load when none of one’s own citizens are affected, means that consular assistance remains a state based issue.

To better understand the different manifestations of ‘remote’ that appear in large-scale consular emergencies, this article chose to separate the analysis into two broad categories that could be largely equated with ‘the concrete’ or physical (distance) and the psychological and cognitive facet of remoteness (displacement). There would be benefit in further subdividing these into more distinct categories such as psychological, cognitive, bureaucratic, geographical, political, or diplomatic remoteness and dealing with these categories and their ramifications in more depth. A wider variety of country and incident cases would also help to shed light on facets that were not prominent in the cases studied here. For example, one could conceive of ‘political remoteness’, in which an affected country is politically or diplomatically closed off, hindering the entry of foreign government officials. The three cases studied here do not reflect political remoteness specifically in relation to consular operations (post-tsunami humanitarian aid access to the region of Aceh in Indonesia was more of a challenge). It could be argued that at the time of the Bali bombings and tsunami, Indonesia had marginally closer diplomatic and leader relations with Australia and this familiarity between officials facilitated cooperation. However, British and Swedish access for consular operations was not compromised to any degree that it could be labelled a case of political remoteness.

When one considers the relationship between remoteness (distance / displacement) and globalisation, there are interesting tensions relevant to consular emergencies. For example, the perception that the world is easily accessible can lead to unrealistic expectations on governments, which have to deal with the reality of geography, flying time, and accessibility while under pressure to reach a disaster site before news media. Features and by-products of globalisation have laid the groundwork for the large-scale nature of the emergency by making it easy and relatively inexpensive for a transient holiday community of citizens to converge in a country on the other side of the world. Enclaves of expatriates or migrants are not a new phenomenon, however, these migrants tend towards permanent settlement and imply a certain self-sufficiency from the state of origin. But temporary migration (such as Scandinavians in the wintertime) also leads to a false sense of security with familiarity and abundant links to home despite being a foreign country. One could also point to globalisation as both a spur for international news and a pressure point on governments that find their actions at home and abroad critiqued against other countries’ responses.
Yet by-products of globalisation greatly assist governments in their response. The emergency response effort is not solely located abroad. It is partially located at the foreign ministry headquarters in the capital city, partly on site at the disaster and from the nearest embassy, but also may incorporate a secondary transit point or involve personnel from embassies in the surrounding region. The telecommunication and transport technology that has grown out of, and facilitated, this connectedness also provides tools that contribute to a smoother, more effective response. Many of the problems of distance and displacement in consular emergency management can not simply be eliminated. Rather a more realistic approach is to recognise their potential to cause (or resolve) issues. If governments can better map the primary destinations of their citizens abroad they maximise their embassies’ capacity to build bureaucratic links with the local governments, to plan and prepare for contingencies, and to educate their citizens on how best to help themselves in an emergency.

The public focus on fellow citizens in consular emergencies and the pressure on the government to rapidly assist national citizens results in a situation in which governments mount their own national operations and responses. Yet this approach misses potential opportunities to cooperate and coordinate with international partners. This (generally ad hoc) cooperation when it did occur in the three emergencies studied, on the whole worked well. This could lead one to the conclusion that integrated operations and closer coordination (not merely cooperation) would be of great benefit. However, it is not simply a matter of mounting the most rapid or resource efficient response. Some citizens attach great importance to comforting symbols from home, such as a flag, a uniform or an accent, and it is possible to utilise items such as national flags for both pragmatic identification purposes and symbolic comfort. Yet this also raises a fundamental tension when discussing whether consular affairs should move out of the national realm. If citizens seek emotional support from the familiar, would they be just as satisfied receiving consular support from other governments? Given that the NAO and Zito Trust post-tsunami study found that eighty percent of respondents initially wanted practical advice and sought emotional support later (2006: 25), there may be potential for greater joint efforts between countries. But it is noteworthy that the displacement facet of remoteness indicates that the more resource efficient solution may not be the most popular - or the most effective - if one considers that the domestic expectation on consular services is to provide a supportive role that goes beyond the pragmatic and tangible.

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References


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Consular assistance during disasters and conflicts abroad: Bridging the capability-expectations gap

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Citizens’ expectations of consular assistance during man-made or natural disasters abroad are rising. But there are wide disparities between the assistance citizens expect and what foreign ministries are capable of providing. Governments’ capacity to respond is reduced when an incident occurs abroad, yet citizens’ expectations of assistance do not decrease proportionally. To better understand the relationship between the state and the citizen in consular emergencies and the challenges faced by foreign ministries and their governments, this study examines the influences on, and impact of, these expectations. First, a crisis management perspective on the gap between government capability and citizen expectations is established. The study then draws on foreign ministry officials’ experiences with expectations and capabilities during large-scale consular emergency responses.

1. Introduction: The capability-expectations gap

Governments are expected to intervene in a wide range of natural and man-made contingencies that affect their citizens. Increasingly governments and their foreign ministries are expected to assist their citizens affected by natural disasters, terrorist attacks and civil unrest while abroad. Governments are expected to retain many of their crisis management functions, and even deliver more services to citizens than would be expected at home. In 2010, the incoming Australian Foreign Minister was warned regarding consular affairs that ‘the continuing growth in expectations of and demand for our services is now pushing strongly against our capacity limits’ and ‘demands on our crisis management systems continue to grow as expectations of whole-of-government responses to international crises and natural disasters increase’ (DFAT 2010, pp. 149-50). Non-routine, often high profile, consular demands such as large-scale emergencies take time and resources away from other foreign ministry tasks. At the same time, governments are under intense scrutiny
and vulnerable to detailed analysis and criticism, and the concurrent decrease in capability for other services can result in further criticism.

In 1993 Christopher Hill identified the European Community's 'capability-expectations gap'. He found that the European Community lacked the ability to agree, and lacked the resources and the instruments that it needed in order to meet the expectations that were put upon it (Hill 1993, p. 315). Ten years later, this idea of a capability-expectations gap was utilized by Boin and 't Hart (2003) in relation to national governments' crisis management function. Boin and 't Hart (2003, p. 546) argued that Beck's (1992) risk society 'nurtures a culture of concern', in which 'political and bureaucratic leaders do not seem to measure up to the increasingly urgent demand for effective crisis prevention, preparedness, and response'. According to Schneider (2011, p. 29) these expectations increased significantly throughout the past decade. Previously, Schneider (1992, p. 135) had studied the gap 'between what governments are prepared to do in emergency management situations' and 'what emerges as the expectations of those victimized by the disaster'. She argued that the assessment and perception of the response as a success or failure was based on expectations prior to response and criticism was determined by size of the gap (Schneider 1992, see also Schneider 1995, Schneider 2011). This capability-expectations gap is widened during consular emergencies and compounds the response challenges for governments. Governments' capacity to respond is reduced when an incident occurs abroad, yet citizens' expectations of assistance do not decrease proportionally.

In the sparse academic literature on consular emergency response and in consular reports and evaluations a trend is evident – public expectations of consular services have grown and continue to increase (see further, Melissen 2011; Tindall forthcoming). However, other than observations that expectations are rising, little research has been conducted on public expectations in consular emergencies. A reason for this could be the difficulty in measuring or determining the precise content of 'public expectations' in relation to crisis management. What is expected of government shifts and changes depending on who is asked and whether an actual disaster is underway. In related areas of inquiry, such as expectations of public services, people's expectations are beginning to receive attention and detailed analysis (James 2009, 107-108, see also Van Ryzin 2004). Relevant to foreign ministries and governments conscious of public opinion, the research found that 'citizens' expectations of public service performance influence their satisfaction with services' (see James 2011, p. 1419).
The empirical material of this study was drawn from research conducted on large-scale consular emergency responses of the Australian, British and Swedish foreign ministry. Accordingly, the observations and analysis are not presumed to be universally applicable. Governments and societies display a variety of approaches and perspectives regarding the role of government and the personal responsibility of citizens. There are nuanced differences in the content and context of citizens' expectations and the degree of control and responsibility that governments assume in relation to citizens' security and safety. Nonetheless, this study contributes to a better understanding of the capability-expectations gap in consular emergency response and the challenges faced by the foreign ministries trying to manage the gap. The study first establishes what the scholarly literature reveals about public expectations of government bureaucracy and leadership in relation to crisis management, and the difficulties in reducing the gap. Then, expectations of consular assistance during emergencies are examined through the experiences of Australian, British and Swedish foreign ministry officials. Finally within this analysis, particular attention is given to the way in which visibility of the national consular response influences both government capabilities and citizen expectations.

2. Public sector crisis management perspectives on expectations

Expectations of a government response

Contributing to a disaster response is generally assumed to be a basic responsibility of government. When disasters pose 'a serious public problem' they are thought to require 'immediate governmental action' (Schneider 1995, p. 9). The risk society's 'culture of concern' shapes public understandings of government's responsibility towards citizens, and threats are 'a function of cultural expectations about levels of order and security' in society (Boin, McConnell and 't Hart 2010, p. 230). In turn, government responses to these threats create a 'political paradox of achievement', in which the expectation that governments are 'rational, just, and omnipotent' is actively encouraged and reinforced by politicians and the bureaucracy (Bovens and 't Hart 1996, pp. 37–9). When disaster strikes there is an expectation that the government 'will intervene to restore the broad status quo', but the rapidly changing and demanding task of politics and public bureaucracy can lead to conflicts and contradictions (Drennan and McConnell 2007, p. 25). Expectations of a 'caring government' are often reinforced by government reassurance that citizens' wellbeing is of utmost concern, but politicians and policymakers then face criticism
when they fail to demonstrate the promised or implied levels of concern (see Boin, 
vanduin and Heyse’s 2001 study of the 1992 Amsterdam plane crash disaster).

Crises often prompt a ‘centralization reflex’ (Boin and McConnell 2007, p. 53) and 
‘strong public, media, interest group, civil service and party-political expectations of 
an upward transfer of decision-making to the Cabinet and indeed the Prime 
Minister’ (McConnell 2003, p. 400). Consequently, expectations that public safety 
should take top priority are placed on the political and bureaucratic leadership of 
government. Government leaders, however, have to weigh up and inevitably 
compromise on the ‘economic and political costs of regulating and enforcing 
maximum safety’ (Boin and ‘t Hart 2003, p. 546). Regardless of whether these 
expectations are ‘misplaced, unfair or illusory ... these expectations are real in their 
political consequences’ (Boin and ‘t Hart 2006, p. 48). ‘Authoritative decision-
makers’ are expected to respond rapidly and personally take responsibility, and ‘to 
not do so leaves them vulnerable to accusations of incompetence, carelessness and 
lack of compassion’ (Drennan and McConnell 2007, p. 166). When expectations of 
government action are not met, ‘the hunt for scapegoats and assigning of blame 
become central issues’ (Enander, Lajksjo, and Tedfeldt 2010, p. 45), and authority 
figures are expected to be held to account (Boin, ‘t Hart, Stern and Sundelius 2005, 
p. 99). Leaders are expected to respond to major societal crises, but the more 
intense their involvement the more they appear personally accountable for an 
inadequate response (Boin, ‘t Hart, McConnell, and Preston 2010, pp. 709-10, 
citing Ellis 1994).

Given that ‘public expectations are high and tolerance of failure is low’ (Drennan 
and McConnell 2007, p. 169) a significant challenge for government during crisis is 
the amplification of ‘the public’s expectations for undebatable and unambiguous 
answers’ (Bungener 2002, p. 204). Governments and their leaders are often 
expected to have greater access to information and greater understanding of events 
than they are capable of at the beginning of a crisis. In this age of specialization 
leaders rely on available expertise and expert advice during crises. However, the 
variety of contingencies and unpredictability of crises makes it difficult to rapidly 
access reliable experts (Rosenthal and ‘t Hart 1993; Koraeus 2008).

Governments both deliberately and inadvertently shape expectation through 
rhetoric via the mass media. Rhetoric invoking appropriate emotion, for instance, 
indignation or reassurance, and the labelling of the event, as an ‘incident’, an 
‘accident’, a ‘tragedy’, a ‘disaster’ or a ‘crisis’, influence expectations about
leadership, authority, appropriate responses and outcomes (Boin et al. 2005, p. 83). Two studies of Hurricane Andrew of 1992 demonstrate this. Carley and Harrald (1997, p. 312) observed that publicly declaring Miami ‘a national disaster led to an expectation on the part of the victims that they should be helped immediately’. Wamsley and Schroeder (1996, p. 237) saw this labelling as ‘keynoting’: ‘the selection of specific ideas around which to rally’. Highly publicized sound bites ‘instantly transformed, in the eyes of the public, what the federal response should be’.

Mass media creates ‘an incentive for policy-makers to take visible action’ (Stern 1997, p. 75), which has become a ‘peak priority in an age of instant images’ (Kapucu 2009, p. 771). Crisis responders could previously focus on the events and the operational response, but ‘governments now have to worry at least as much about the image the general public has of these events’ (‘t Hart, Heyse, and Boin 2001, p. 183). However, when citizens are severely affected by disasters, these incidents provide a platform for governments to fulfil the expectation of a ‘caring government’. This expectation is encouraged by governments through symbolic acts or rituals, such as speeches and memorials, which demonstrate care for and engagement with victims of disasters (see further, ‘t Hart 1993).

The humanization of crises and the rising expectations of a ‘caring government’ thereby extend to post-crisis recognition of losses suffered. Often regardless of the nature of the crisis or the number involved, governments are routinely expected to engage in visible acts of memoriam, for example, declaring a national day of mourning, partaking in mourning rituals, marking anniversaries, or funding memorial sites (Boin et al. 2005, pp. 69-90). However, once memorial sites have been established, there is greater expectation for memorial sites elsewhere (Stoney et al. 2011, p. 71). Success or failure in symbolic crisis management can shape public perception of the management of a crisis. This perception can enhance or detract from governments’ or leaders’ public image, which can, in turn, positively or negatively affect perceptions of government effectiveness and influence voter confidence (see for example, Bytzek’s 2008 analysis of the 2002 Elbe flood in Germany). Governments are generally expected to respond when citizens are threatened. Regardless of the difficulties of enacting effective crisis management, there are repercussions if the government fails to meet various expectations, including that of the ‘caring government’. Meeting public and media expectations is all the more challenging because of the substantial gap between governments’ capability and the expectations placed on government.
Attempts to bridge the capability-expectations gap

Large-scale and highly mediatized disasters have raised awareness of governments’ crisis management function. This has resulted in a more in-depth appraisal of governments’ crisis management capability at all levels (see Palm and Ramsell 2007, p. 173). Improving crisis management capabilities and managing expectations is a challenge for governments. When governments are successful at mitigating disaster, improved capabilities may even widen the gap further by increasing expectations. Dudley (2005, p. 94) cites Vickers’ (1984, pp. 24–25) example in which improvements to health service provisions correlated with public expectations for increased health. Even if expectations were to remain static, new infrastructure and technologies strain capability and produce new contingencies for governments to manage. Each passing year sees larger and more complex infrastructure, but ‘society’s expectations for health, safety and environmental protection will be the same for these mega-structures as it is for those of lesser dimensions’ (Drennan and McConnell 2007, p. 209). Technological innovation can help governments to better respond to crises. But the same technology can also change citizens’ perceptions of what is reasonable, thereby disproportionately increasing expectations and widening the gap. Technical innovation can result in ‘interactive complexity’ and ‘tight-coupled systems’ (Perrow 1984) that require particular skill sets and specific training. As evolving technology increases expectations of capability, these technological developments may actually decrease capability.

There is widespread and increasing use of personal telecommunication devices, such as mobile phones. With these advances a greater sector of society expects near instant communication and has faith in technologies’ ability to facilitate a rapid resolution to problems, especially as a ‘lifeline’ when under threat (Eriksson 2010, pp. 171–72). Adding to the challenge for government, the expectation of technology-aided assistance includes the expectation that this assistance be provided with human interaction and compassion (Eriksson 2010, p. 171). Eriksson (2010, p. 171) cites the example of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, in which Swedish citizens in Thailand called the Swedish emergency services ‘hoping to quickly call for emergency assistance from home, despite the huge geographical distance’. Their subsequent dissatisfaction with Swedish emergency response capabilities was intensified by the ‘expectations created by the communications technologies’ apparent ability to dissolve the importance of space’. 
Many governments are further expected to ensure smooth functioning of
government and society during crises. In the UK, these citizen expectations have
been enshrined in legislation. The 2004 Civil Contingencies Act requires authorities
to prepare to provide efficient and effective routine emergency services (and regular
non-emergency services) concurrent with services that may be required in a large-
scale crisis (Drennan and McConnell 2007, p. 107). In times of uncertainty, the
electorate expects not only operational effectiveness but also a coherent
articulation of procedure and strategy. Government planning may reduce the gap
from both directions. While planning serves to increase capability, in addition,
‘effective crisis planning manages public expectations by acknowledging the inherent
trade-offs of crisis management’ (Boin and ‘t Hart 2010, p. 360). The act of
contingency planning demonstrates that the contingency is on the government
radar and provides ‘societal reassurance and political stability’. Nevertheless,
‘contingency planning processes and plans, will often struggle to live up to the more
politicised expectations’ (Eriksson and McConnell 2011, p. 97).

It has been well established that governments are expected to intervene when
public safety is threatened (see especially, Schneider 1992; Schneider 1995; Boin and
‘t Hart 2003; Boin and ‘t Hart 2006; Drennan and McConnell 2007; Schneider
2007). But even with sustained effort by government leadership and bureaucracy to
reduce the capability-expectations gap, governments can still fall prey to
expectations that ‘the world should be free of failure’ (Carley and Harrald 1997, p.
310). According to Wildavsky (1988, pp. 14 and 70) ‘as people get richer, they will
demand safer products and safer jobs’ and the ‘capacity to undertake both
anticipatory and resilient strategies’ is increased. Richer and more developed
societies have become accustomed to standards of occupational health and safety,
are largely protected by quality assurance in structural materials, and are no longer
threatened by epidemic diseases such as polio (Boin and McConnell 2007, p. 52).
Accordingly, unrealistic ‘expectations for safety [persist], even though complete
protection is impossible’ (Kettl 2003, p. 271). This expectation of government
action to assist its citizens is not confined to purely domestic emergencies.
Drennan and McConnell (2007, pp. 214-17) have observed that there is now an
expectation that government will have ‘contingency planning to deal with crises in
other countries’ (see further, Schwarz and McConnell 2009). Regardless of
geographical distance, and even as the affected country is endeavouring to manage
the disaster or civil unrest, there remains ‘high media and citizen expectations’ that
leaders have the knowledge and ability to respond rapidly and effectively in a
foreign country (Drennan and McConnell 2007, p. 214).
The influences on rising expectations and decreased capabilities observed in consular assistance will be examined below. It is problematic to attempt to directly measure or generalize expectations expressed by the public or through the media. Expectations of consular emergency responses vary widely among a population and will shift depending on a number of factors, for example, assumptions regarding crisis management responsibility within a particular society, or whether an emergency has recently occurred, is hypothetical, or underway. One way to begin to understand how expectations manifest in relation to consular emergency responses is by examining the experiences and insights of those who have come into contact with these 'expectations' and have observed the result of expectations in action. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that these observations reflect a particular, foreign ministry centric perspective on the capability-expectations gap and represent practitioners' 'theory-in-use' (Argyris and Schön 1974).

The analysis is derived primarily from the experiences and observations of thirteen foreign ministry officials: two from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), five from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Utrikesdepartementet, UD), and six from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The semi-structured interviews, all conducted in 2010 by the author, focused on the experience of participating in, and working with policy in relation to, large-scale consular emergency responses. Interviewees held key roles in the consular services sections, in diplomatic posts abroad, and in on-the-ground response teams. Three consular emergencies were chosen as case studies. Eight of the interviewees had participated in the 2006 evacuations from Lebanon, five in the response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and two in the response to the 2002 Bali terrorist attacks. Four interviewees were in a consular policy or consular crisis management role at the time of the interviews. Five interviewees had experience on-the-ground (at a diplomatic post or as part of a response team) during at least one of the emergencies, and seven had experience responding to at least one of the three emergencies from the foreign ministry headquarters.

3. Understanding the consular emergency capability-expectations gap

Rising expectations of consular capabilities

A capability-expectations gap is evident in consular services, without an apparent upper limit on what can be expected of the government (FCO 1, 18 April). The ‘bar has been raised higher’ and expectations have increased through the course of major consular events, including the 2002 Bali bombings, 2004 Indian Ocean
tsunami, and 2006 evacuations from Lebanon (Former FCO 2, 2 June). Situations in which a large number of foreign nationals are in need of assistance are particularly demanding as this escalates the response challenges (FCO 3, 24 May). Moreover, 'consular regulations do not readily adapt to cope' with large-scale incidents (SOU 2008, p. 20). Expectations of consular services are in part indexed by the services that citizens expect when in their home country (Former UD 1, 20 May). When citizens are used to receiving certain services from their government, it is logical for travellers to, in part 'assume that going abroad, that they will take some of this with them' (UD 2, 21 May). Even though the response is located outside national territory, many travellers will not have a clear understanding of the extent of the differences regarding what is available (FCO 4, 21 May).

Rising expectations of consular services is 'a global phenomenon', stemming not from a particular government's policy or the circumstances of a particular event, but rather generally 'unrealistic expectations of what governments can do' (Richardson 2011). It would be erroneous, however, to assume that all citizens in distress abroad have the same expectations of government. There was a great variation in the level of expectations and not all citizens abroad sought help from their government when caught in a disaster. Many are capable of removing themselves from harm's way without assistance (FCO 4, 21 May). There is an expectation during large-scale consular emergencies that the foreign ministry will have a rapid and broad overview of the crisis situation. However in reality, a fuller picture of events will often not come about until well into the response (FCO 4, 21 May). According to one foreign ministry official, citizens 'will often know before us what is happening on the ground', and this 'can create the impression that ... we do not have the oversight that we should be having' (UD 2, 21 May). As noted previously, 'rising expectations are at least partly because of the pervasive use of technology in everyday life' (Hamilton 2011, p. 161). As one foreign ministry official observed: 'We're not quicker than our tourists'. Travelling citizens now 'have their mobile phones, they all look on Facebook, they are all online continuously' and their information can be as good as the foreign ministry's (UD 2, 21 May). Expectations of what the government should be able to provide in a consular emergency have been shaped by the everyday 'rapid access to vast quantities of information' (Hamilton 2011, p. 145).

In consular emergencies there is great demand for information, and the news media is particularly interested in how many citizens are affected. As a foreign ministry official recalled, the 'media demands numbers ... and ministers want numbers', but
the ‘first numbers are always wrong’, and even though ‘we say that this is just a very initial estimate ... people will use the number, and once you have a number you have to confirm the number or deny the number’ (DFAT 1, 11 March). Information collection and distribution in a disaster presents a challenge for foreign ministries as ‘just management of information and accuracy of information chews up your crisis management capacities’ (DFAT 1, 11 March). Furthermore, it is not only a challenge to collect this information, but also a sensitive issue determining what information can be distributed and what information is to be protected under privacy protocols (UD 3, 2 March).

Foreign ministries have been actively trying to manage and mitigate the expectation that the state will look after citizens abroad, particularly as high expectations of government capabilities may result in less preparation on the part of travellers. This reflects Auf der Heide’s (1989, cited in Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001, p. 53) observations that emergency services planning and preparedness suffers when there are ‘inflated expectations about response capability’ and ‘ambiguities about responsibility for preparedness’. Foreign ministries run extensive information campaigns, such as the British ‘Know Before You Go’ or Australian ‘Smartraveller’ campaigns, endeavouring to better prepare travellers and reduce pressure on consular services. Expectation management is one of the objectives of these campaigns, so that travelling citizens ‘understand that they have got a personal responsibility’ and understand what ‘you really should have in place as a responsible citizen’ (Former FCO 2, 2 June).

Government actions shape expectations. When the government manages the consular emergency response well, this can increase expectations in similar future situations. Successful operations can further raise expectations beyond the government’s capability (UD 2, 21 May). In a manifestation of the paradox of achievement, ‘a cycle of rising expectations’ is created (White 2007, p. 6) and ‘it is very hard to go backwards once that benchmark has been set’ (DFAT 1, 11 March). Closing the capability-expectations gap by increasing capabilities becomes problematic when exceptional actions in one consular response become routinely expected.

Even when foreign ministries attempt to formalize the limits of responsibility, individual circumstances of each emergency, for example a sudden risk to children or those especially vulnerable, can lead to revisions in the actual response (FCO 5, 25 June). Furthermore, there is a persistent expectation that as taxpayers, travelling
citizens have the right to assistance in an emergency (UD 4, 1 June; FCO 6, 25 June). On the one hand it is legitimate for citizens, as taxpayers, to expect 'reasonable consular assistance' from their government (Broadbent et al. 2009, p. 27), and there are circumstances that necessitate government involvement, such as the issuing of emergency travel documents (Okano-Heijmans 2011, p. 31). On the other hand, these expectations 'often far exceed its capacity to provide assistance' (Broadbent et al. 2009, p. 29).

Despite campaigns and strategies aimed at managing expectations, foreign ministries providing consular assistance in a foreign disaster have little control over influences on citizen expectations. Citizens 'will compare their experiences with the perceived speed of response from other countries' (UK Government 2007, p. 3). These comparisons put pressure on foreign ministries. From a foreign ministry perspective, when one government appears to be providing a particular type or level of assistance that 'your government is not, then you've either got to raise your game, or explain why you are doing things differently' (Former FCO 2, 2 June). A number of factors can influence expectations, including the environment around citizens. If it is a familiar environment they may be more likely to expect familiar processes and routines. In the 2006 evacuation from Lebanon, as citizens moved from the 'war zone into transport, they begin to experience something that is more akin to airline travel, and so the expectation is that this is more like airline travel'. Subsequently, citizens may have routine travel expectations, such as being able to select their seats on the plane (DFAT 1, 11 March).

Full coverage of the world is not possible for any foreign ministry network. Even when government representation is present in a country, consular assistance is just one of the many functions of embassies and consulates. Posts may be primarily tasked with fostering foreign government or business relations in the region. But when a disaster strikes, posts then have to rapidly transform the day-to-day consular assistance function to manage large-scale emergencies. A further area of difficulty for foreign ministries is when citizens expect that there will be consistency between assistance in all parts of the world. Governments have their largest embassies and greatest numbers of personnel in places where their most significant national interests are situated. This may include popular destinations for their citizens. For instance, Thailand is one of the prime overseas destinations for Swedish citizens. However, travellers, 'are looking for new challenges, new borders to explore', so now 'people will not go to Thailand, but to Cambodia'. Yet 'the expectations to get help will be the same as in Thailand' (UD 2, 21 May). Just as it is
hard for governments to keep pace with new contingencies and technologies, so too in consular services, 'it is difficult for the state to keep up with this evolving scenario' (UD 2, 21 May).

As discussed previously, expectations and opinions of the government may bear little relation to governments' actual capability. Moreover, expectations of consular assistance are at times actively encouraged and influenced for political purposes. On the first anniversary of the Indian Ocean tsunami, British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, apologized to the victims that felt they had not received adequate assistance, saying that British citizens 'these days, have very high expectations of what the British government can deliver – and fair enough' (Straw 2005). There is an expectation of a 'caring government' response demonstrated through actions and rhetoric, and there are incentives for governments to mount a visible national response as a way to reassure citizens and to gain credit for actions. Furthermore, when the disaster is abroad, the crisis management expectations and government responses take on an increased national dimension.

Visibility of the 'caring government' abroad

A visible government presence abroad is only one part of the broader issue of state involvement and actions in response to consular emergencies. It also cannot be assumed that all citizens abroad are concerned if they receive assistance from their government, as they may just be looking for assistance from anyone that can help. Part of the call for government assistance is simply that in crises the government represents authority, and an official (i.e. national) response is expected (FCO 4, 21 May). However, it is valuable to examine attempts to address the expectations gap by demonstrating increased capacity. This element of the capability-expectations gap illustrates the continued relevance of the state-citizen relationships, with citizens as both 'taxpayers' and 'nationals'. There is a 'certain nationalistic dimension' to the notion of consular affairs, and 'most citizens of any country want to have help from their own government'. This expectation is 'reflected in the consular conventions' and becomes a 'flow on' from citizenship (UD 2, 21 May). 'Professional consular assistance' is perceived by government to be 'the combined result of the responsibilities that come with statehood and the moral rights that are inferred by their national' citizenship' (Melissen 2011, p. 4). But as citizenship is becoming less important to the individual, at the same time 'the responsibilities expected of (and accepted by) the state to protect citizens' have appeared to increase (White 2007, p. 2).
As there is a desire or expectation from citizens for their government to respond, visibility of the state during the consular response serves important practical and strategic functions. High visibility aids in reducing complaints regarding any lack of response or care, and frees responders to concentrate on the practicalities of their tasks (FCO 5, 25 June). Criticisms faced by governments during consular emergencies often include those of citizens that have needed assistance but have not seen or received help from a government official. The difficulty on the ground is that there are not a large number of foreign government personnel, so it is necessary to find other ways to demonstrate that a national response has been mounted. For example, at strategic meeting points such as at the airport, visibility of the national flag and officials in badged clothing provides instant identification and reassurance (FCO 1, 18 April). However a balance has to be struck. A visible response risks raising expectations that the government is present, when this may not reflect the capacity and operational realities on the ground.

Making heads of mission, such as ambassadors, visible in the media is one strategy to make the entire response more visible as diplomats come to be seen as representatives of the government response. It also aids in addressing the need for authority figures in a crisis. The British response to the Bali bombings for example, reinforced for the UK government the value of having the head of mission present on the scene, to assume control of the operation and acknowledge the significance of the incident and crisis response (FCO 5, 25 June). The presence of high-level officials is thought to provide credibility to the response (DFAT 1, 11 March). However, credibility can be rapidly lost if authority figures fall into ‘credibility traps’ and fail to ‘closely monitor how their messages are being received and act to correct problems’ (Stern and Sundelius 2002, p. 80). Because consular emergencies are both a reputational and operational issue, there needs to be a deliberate and carefully considered balancing of symbolic and operational crisis response on the part of key leadership figures (FCO 5, 25 June). The media provides a platform for crisis managers to demonstrate their presence and authority as soon as the disaster occurs. Their presence and engagement is intended to send the message that the government response is underway (FCO 3, 24 May). Making authority figures visible to citizens in a consular emergency response is a way for governments to address expectations and ‘issues around government competence and its care for its citizens’ (Former FCO 2, 18 April).

As part of the ‘caring government’ response there is an expectation that ‘leaders should be compassionate toward victims of crises’ (Boin and ‘t Hart 2003, p. 548),
and this translates over to consular emergency responses, which require ‘constant balancing of expectations and compassion’ (Former FCO 2, 2 June). However, the cost of looking after citizens abroad is very high in proportion to the numbers being helped. Costs can escalate rapidly, particularly when chartering planes (FCO 3, 24 May). No government can afford to provide unlimited consular services. Governments and foreign ministries have to weigh up, and inevitably compromise on, the ‘economic and political costs of regulating and enforcing maximum safety’ (Boin and ’t Hart 2003, p. 546), which is why despite the high expectations, consular departments are facing budget cuts (Broadbent et al. 2009, p. 35).

Familiar symbols or representations of the state, for instance the flag and national colours, engage and reassure citizens abroad and demonstrate a national presence (see ’t Hart 1993 for a discussion of symbols in crisis management). There is a practical purpose to these visible displays of national presence. They serve as identifiers, showing citizens where they can receive assistance and allowing members of the response team to identify each other in a crowd (UD 5, 4 June). But from the perspective of foreign ministry officials responding to these consular emergencies, identifiers also serve a symbolic and authoritative purpose (UD 5, 4 June). A British foreign ministry official explained that during the on the ground operations, one of the reasons ‘why everything was badged with the Union Jack and embassy logos, such as the outfits that they [responders] wore’ was that ‘it gives a sense of connection’ (Former FCO 2, 2 June). Previous experiences in emergency responses illustrated for responders that these symbolic representations of the state served not only a practical purpose such as identification, but also an emotional purpose by providing reassurance.

The symbolic and practical purpose of having familiar figures of authority was noted in both the Swedish and Australian experience in Lebanon. In particular, national police officers were seen to have a calming and regulating effect. An Australian foreign ministry official noted that Australian police officers played a valuable role in the evacuations from Lebanon. This was not because there were significant problems with evacuees, but for ‘people handling, and basic law and order, because people are very stressed and very upset’ (DFAT 1, 11 March). In the Swedish experience, Swedish police officers were sent to the embassy in Damascus and this helped to keep order as the Swedish police officers provided familiarity and a sense of safety and security (Former UD, 20 May). Other identifiers of the nation can serve both an operational and a symbolic purpose. For example, during the British evacuations from Lebanon, the British Royal Navy was originally
brought in for operational purposes, but also served a symbolic purpose. British foreign ministry officials recalled that the use of the Navy in the response operations to evacuate citizens resulted in powerful images on the news in the UK (FCO 5, 25 June), and produced positive public relations (FCO 1, 18 April). National military assets made visible the response that was also underway from other responding governments that, without available military resources, were chartering private vessels (FCO 5, 25 June).

There is a public and media expectation that citizens will be able to receive assistance from their own government and there is pressure to make the national response visible. Through the media, citizens voiced their surprise that they received assistance from another government and not their own. However, on the ground in a foreign disaster this may not facilitate the most efficient response. Given the limited foreign government personnel on the ground, in some cases their government had coordinated with another responding government and was, in turn, assisting citizens of other countries (FCO 5, 25 June). But on the other hand, the strategic importance of a visible national presence needs to be acknowledged in the response. Perceptions of an inadequate government response, even if ill-matched to reality, can result in decisions made less for an operational purpose and more to satisfy political and media pressure. Therefore, the goal is to prioritize the operational response but make it visible to reassure the public and media that there is an adequate national response in progress (DFAT 2, 11 February).

Recognized in the British post-tsunami review of the FCO, was the need for the response to balance the operational value of consular cooperation and burden-sharing ‘against an expectation among British nationals that they will be able to see a representative of the British Government if they get into difficulty overseas’ (NAO and Zito Trust 2006, p. 9). ‘High anxiety and feelings of helplessness’ on the part of citizens caught up in foreign disasters is exacerbated by ‘difficulties with language and unfamiliar laws and customs’ (Hamilton 2011, p. 160). The desire is not necessarily for a common tongue, but a common understanding of issues and concerns: ‘at a certain point people want to feel that they are being looked after by people who understand where they’re coming from’ (FCO 4, 21 May). ‘You need to know that somebody understands what you’re saying, but also understands your situation’ (Former FCO 2, 2 June). Nevertheless, language does play a role in this understanding. Hearing one’s own language can provide a sense of comfort and security within a distressing situation (Former UD 1, 20 May). Even if coordinated action is practical, especially when the disaster occurs outside a government’s area
of strategic interest, there is still public and media pressure to mount a national response.

Citizens seek help in emergencies from figures of authority, and regularly expect these authority figures to be representatives of their national government. Visibility is important, partly from a practical perspective, for citizens to be able to identify sources of assistance, but also as a method of reassurance. Key figures such as ambassadors play an important role as a symbolic figure of authority. Furthermore, symbols and representations of the state, from flags to police officers, offer familiarity, comfort and connection for citizens in distressing conditions abroad. While some citizens simply expect logistical assistance, others expect this assistance to be provided with reassurance and compassion.

4. Conclusion: The widening gap and cycle of rising expectations

The capability-expectations gap is applicable not only to public sector crisis management, but also to consular emergency response more specifically. This capability-expectations gap is widened in consular emergencies. Government's response capabilities are reduced in consular assistance, but expectations do not decrease concurrently. Elements of the domestic crisis management function are expected to carry over across borders, including elements that would not be expected of government at home. Literature on consular assistance recognizes the problems posed by such a gap, but there has been little in depth analysis or examination of the gap. This capability-expectation gap is problematic for foreign ministries operationally because it diverts attention and funds from other foreign ministry activities, such as diplomacy or security. To gain a more nuanced understanding of the consular capability-expectation gap, this analysis has grounded it in the context of the public sector crisis management capability-expectation gap. Examining the crisis management literature, it becomes evident that this is a broader problem best understood in relation to the 'risk society', the political 'paradox of achievement', and the 'caring government'. Managing expectations and addressing the capability-expectations gap takes on an additional dimension when the disaster is outside the borders of the state.

According to experiences of foreign ministry officials working with consular emergency response and evidenced in the literature on consular assistance, public expectations are rising. Governments and their foreign ministries are unable to keep pace with this increase. A crisis management perspective on public expectations offers a way to understand what is happening in the consular
assistance domain during natural disasters, terrorist attacks and civil unrest abroad. Transboundary crises are becoming a greater concern for governments (see Ansell, Boin and Keller 2010), and compared to traditionally domestic emergencies, the consular facet of governments’ crisis management draws attention to different aspects of the citizen-government relationship. This focus allowed for a closer examination of citizens’ expectations of the state, the nature of the state’s relationship to its citizens, and citizens’ expectations of these relationships.

Rising expectations evident in consular assistance are not universal to all citizens, as some do not expect assistance from their government while abroad. Nevertheless, citizen expectations as both ‘taxpayers’ and ‘nationals’ can cause significant reputational and budgetary problems for foreign ministries. Governments attempt to communicate the need for citizens to take personal responsibility and there have been calls for states to set and adhere to limits. However, it has proven difficult for governments to define limits when cases vary greatly and public pressure mounts during disasters. The ‘paradox of achievement’ comes into play when government action, especially a successful operation, sets the bar for expectations of future responses. A new set of dilemmas is created when ‘past successes lead to future failures’ and governments are ‘doing better’ but ‘feeling worse’ (Wildavsky 1977, p. 106). The expectation of a ‘caring government’ and compassion remains during consular emergencies. There is an increased national dimension to the expectations of the response in emergencies abroad, including national symbols and figures of authority. In foreign emergencies, where governments do not necessarily have the same authority or access to the resources, the already problematic capability-expectations gap is highlighted.

Part of the challenge for governments is that citizens’ expectations are influenced by previous responses, the politics and actions of other countries, and citizens’ familiarity with the environment and familiarity with the procedures that have been put in place previously. When a particular feature of the consular response that was originally exceptional occurs repeatedly, it becomes the norm and thus expected. Expectations of consular action mirrors expectations seen in the general crisis management literature, but with a different emphasis reflecting the consular dimension, i.e. citizens abroad. Despite this key difference, the state is still expected to have greater knowledge and understanding of the events than its citizens. Governments are expected to provide citizens with information as rapidly as citizens can obtain with their own use of technology. There is an expectation that governments can accurately estimate how many citizens are affected even
though officials for the most part rely on citizens to approach them or register on online databases.

In Christopher Hill's (1993) original conceptualization, the capability-expectations gap was in place because the European Community had been promoted as able to do more than it actually could. Ambitions exceeded ability. There is an element of self-promotion and ambition in foreign ministry and government rhetoric and action in relation to consular assistance (i.e. the paradox of achievement). However, in the case of consular responses, the driver of the high expectations also comes from a broader societal understanding of government's role in relation to the safety and security of its citizens. The expectations of the government-citizen relationships have been extrapolated to the consular function of government, without due consideration given to the actual capacity of the government to respond to citizens in distress abroad. The consular capability-expectations gap is widening and will continue to widen with increased travel, the advent of more advanced technology, the professionalization and specialization of operations, and the actions of other governments.

In theory, the reduction of the gap would require one of three scenarios. First, the government could try to curtail the rise in expectations through articulation (and crucially enactment) of a more realistic approach. However, this is difficult when forces outside foreign ministries affect expectations as much if not more than the foreign ministry and government actions and rhetoric. Secondly, the government could actively attempt to reduce expectations, but this is unlikely in a political world with an election cycle that leads to campaigning every few years. Few politicians would declare that they will do less to assist citizens than their predecessor.

The most likely scenario is that increased capacity could reduce the gap. Practically however, this would be difficult given budgetary constraints. Furthermore, as it is not known where the next big emergency will arise, enhancing capabilities through preparedness is all the more challenging in consular response. The scope for governments to act in another government's jurisdiction varies. It can depend on the laws and protocols of the other country, on the relationship between governments, on the history of cooperation, and whether any anticipatory protocols have been established between governments. The overall degree of control a government can exert over their response to a disaster or conflict abroad also depends on the involvement of other actors in what can be a competitive
space. Private industry, including airlines or travel agencies, and NGOs such as the Red Cross also assist foreign nationals caught up in disasters abroad. Moreover, even when capabilities are increased, it would not be long before expectations rise again to exceed the new norm. While government could set limits on their responsibility toward citizens abroad, and increased funding could be funnelled into improving the consular response, the public sector crisis management literature indicates that closing the gap entirely is improbable, if not impossible.

In his reflections on the possibility of closing the capability-expectations gap in the European Union, Hill (1998, p. 38) observed that 'the divergence of expectations from capability is a human tendency'. He concluded that 'the EU is not good at saying “no”, or at being honest with itself and its citizens'. This observation is just as applicable to governments during consular emergencies. While there are myriad outside forces affecting citizen expectations, the best place to begin closing the gap is with matching government words with deeds. In the meantime, the best option is to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of citizen expectations, the motivations and concerns embedded in these expectations, and what factors are most influential in expanding the gap between government capability and citizen expectations of consular emergency responses.
References


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*Statement of authorship:* Both authors formulated the aims of the article. Karen Tindall collected the empirical data. Both authors conducted the analysis and designed the framework.

*Erratum:* In Table 1 on page 140 (journal pagination) of this article, cell B2 should read: ‘degree of intragovernmental alignment between different forms of emergency responses’.
Evaluating government performance during consular emergencies: Toward an analytical framework

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Abstract

When consular emergencies happen – in which a considerable number of nationals are affected by a disaster while abroad – it is not clear what affected citizens and their relatives can and cannot expect from their government. Meanwhile, governments have to contend with issues of distance and the inability to exercise their authority on-the-ground. In such complex, multi-actor and often multi-national settings, one cannot measure governmental emergency management by the same yardsticks used to assess domestic emergency management performance. This article develops an evaluation framework that is tailored to large-scale consular emergencies. We operationalise six key response functions into indicators, which provide a more nuanced perspective on governments’ performance in an emergency. The relevance of the framework is illustrated with reference to case study vignettes from British, Swedish and Australian responses to three major consular emergencies: the 2002 Bali bombings, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and 2006 evacuations from war-stricken Lebanon.

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1. The challenge of consular emergencies

Governments face a large-scale consular emergency when a number of their nationals are significantly affected by a disaster, mass violence or other major disruptive events while abroad. In contemporary mass travel societies, consular emergencies are accidents waiting to happen but it is difficult to predict when, where or how any particular one will occur. The key policy challenge for government in such an event is how to fulfil the classic protective functions of the state vis-à-vis its citizens when it cannot wield externally the sovereign powers it has within its own territory; and physical and jurisdictional ‘distance’ complicate the elementary processes of emergency response. This article constructs a framework for evaluating government performance during consular emergencies and demonstrates its practical relevance by presenting empirical illustrations from three diverse cases.

While foreign policy and diplomacy are an inevitable component of any kind of consular emergency response, they are seldom at its heart. The core concerns – protecting, caring for and repatriating one’s own citizens – are rather part and parcel of conventional domestic emergency management even though the foreign ministry is often designated to lead the response. However, unlike in domestic emergencies, governments have to contend with the challenge of...
operating outside national boundaries in a possibly geographically distant location. This international setting for what is essentially a domestic emergency constrains governments. They have to take into account the governments of the country or countries in which the emergency has occurred. Their actions may also be shaped by pressures arising from actions of other foreign governments that are likewise staging responses directed at their own citizens. Furthermore, while consular policy as defined by the 1963 ‘Vienna convention on consular relations’ remains a national issue between a government and its citizens, supranational institutions such as the European Union are becoming more involved in many areas of domestic policy including consular affairs. Although there is as yet no move toward a joint European Union consular service beyond reciprocal agreements between member-states, there is some cooperation and increasing communication between EU member-states during emergencies, for example, an EU Council Working Group on Consular Cooperation (COCON); and in 2006 a European Commission ‘Green Paper on Diplomatic and consular protection of Union citizens in third countries’ was drawn up for consideration (COM (2006) 712) resulting in a 2007-2009 ‘Action plan’ (COM(2007)767).

One key problem in assessing consular emergency responses is that there are almost no national policy frameworks for this type of contingency. Generic consular policy guidelines are now easily accessible on most governments’ websites, clearly stating what governments can or cannot do for their citizens abroad. However, what citizens can expect from their governments during a major emergency abroad is left unspecified. A rare exception to the prevailing informal, convention-based practices can be found in Sweden, where a ‘Consular Disaster Act’ became effective from August 2010. Its origins lay in the 2004 tsunami disaster which left more than 500 Swedes dead and many more injured, followed 18 months later by the conflict in Lebanon from which several thousand Swedish citizens were evacuated. After two major consular incidents in short succession, Swedish lawmakers decided a more systematic framework was needed. The Act asserts that the state will be prepared and willing to intervene in a situation that affects its citizens. However, it also stipulates that citizens are responsible for paying for evacuation or health care received in large-scale emergencies just as in individual cases. The Act provides a framework of intent but does not specify the kind of concrete and consistent goal-set that classic approaches to policy evaluation presume.

More specific laws and regulations may also be amended during or immediately following a major consular emergency. The mass evacuation of 15,000 Canadian citizens from Lebanon, including a number of dual Lebanese-Canadian citizens permanently residing in Lebanon, sparked a debate in Canada which put a review of dual citizenship law and policy onto the political agenda. Likewise, in the aftermath of the tsunami the British authorities announced that the seven-year period that families had to wait before a missing person could be declared legally dead could be reduced to one year if the family could prove the missing person had been in an affected area at the time of the tsunami (Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2005).

Their low-frequency/potentially high-impact status, the lack of clear policy frameworks, the significant situational constraints and the influence of external actors combine to make consular emergency response operations a particularly challenging target of evaluation exercises. Moreover, there are strategic choices and dilemmas aplenty. To name but a few: What matters most in responding to the outbreak of war abroad: smooth repatriation of affected citizens or maintaining constructive relations with the now warring governments? A speedy but improvised evacuation effort or a slower but more robustly planned one? Working in tandem with other nations, including the sharing of embassy personnel and relief resources, or going it alone and even competing for scarce on-site assets? How far and to what depth does the government responsibility extend? Is it enough to simply move citizens into the closest available safe area or neighbouring country, or should they be given safe passage all the way home? Who should bear the costs of consular emergency preparedness and response operations?

As for the ultimate arbiters of consular crisis response effectiveness, the ‘clients’, i.e., the directly affected citizens and their families, may seem likely candidates to fulfil this function. However, their assessment of effectiveness is largely based on the public actions of the government, as they are not privy to the diplomacy, negotiations and decision-making component of the consular response. Furthermore, the experiences and post hoc judgments of those receiving assistance vary widely. This is partly because of the lack of uniform expectations as to the level or quality of assistance that can be reasonably expected, and partly because of fragmented, patchy service provision on-the-ground. It also depends whether individuals assessing ‘success’ ultimately favour quantity or quality: do they value the fact that their government manages to evacuate all 5000 of their fellow citizens from a disaster zone, or do they take their own individual experiences of emergency communication and service provision as their reference point?

Large-scale consular emergencies are diverse in their locations, triggers and specificities. On the surface they can appear too different to be considered part of a distinct type of contingency. However, as the framework will illustrate, en
masse consular events can differ in location, composition and nature, but exhibit common themes and challenges. To offer a better understanding of the characteristics of large-scale consular emergencies, and the empirical context and problem space in which the framework was constructed, the circumstances and fundamental consular needs in three large-scale emergencies are summarised below. Each is a large-scale example of a consular emergency trigger (natural disaster, terrorist attack, and civil conflict) chosen for their notability and diversity to construct and illustrate the framework.

In the July 2006 evacuations from Lebanon there were tens of thousands of foreign citizens, many dual citizens. Some families did not all hold the same citizenship but did not wish to be separated. These individuals were caught in a volatile environment and intermittent bombing from Israel, which threatened and damaged infrastructure such as roads, ports, and the Beirut airport. The conflict resulted in few foreign casualties, but the risk was high. The primary challenge for foreign governments was to move such a large number of individuals and families. It was too dangerous to evacuate by air and risky to evacuate over land borders in case convoys were targeted. Many foreign governments decided it would be expedient to charter ships to ferry their citizens from Lebanese ports to safety, primarily to Cyprus. For many foreign governments that did not have resources in the region, it was necessary to charter private vessels which were in high demand and short supply.

When the 2004 tsunami suddenly and forcefully inundated beaches of Southeast Asia during peak tourist season, there were tens of thousands of foreign nationals spread across several countries and often in hard to access coastal areas. There were thousands of foreign dead, missing and injured. Family members had been separated. Many had lost their possessions including passports and credit cards. Although the embassies in Bangkok were unaffected by the physical destruction, they were overwhelmed by the numbers that needed assistance. The few personnel available had to move into the affected areas to set up temporary posts and processing centres until reinforcements could arrive. The disaster received substantial media attention, which spotlighted governments’ actions and inaction. It also resulted in tens of thousands of phone calls to foreign ministry call centres and government hotlines, many of which were unprepared and unable to manage the inundation.

The destruction from the 2002 nightclub bombings on Bali was more localised than the tsunami or Lebanon evacuations and affected fewer individuals. However, the consular challenge was for authorities to respond to a mass-casualty incident in a foreign country among the political and security maelstrom of a terrorist attack directed at foreign nationals. Australia, while geographically close and with a substantial diplomatic corps in Indonesia, faced the largest loss of life, as more than half of the deceased were Australian. Countries with fewer deceased still faced the same destruction and conditions, but at a greater distance and with fewer personnel in Indonesia able to respond.

From a general crisis management perspective these events are geographically diverse, with different operational challenges and priorities. However, from a consular perspective, they have underlying commonalities. The events affected a number of citizens, who in these severe conditions were unable to get themselves to safety. Relevant embassies and consulates were overwhelmed, and the response required greater capacity than the foreign ministry alone could provide. Governments’ crisis management capacities were highly contingent on the large-scale nature of the disasters and the particularities of operating outside sovereign territory.

Evaluating consular emergencies as a category or type of contingency, rather than isolated incidents, is difficult due to the differences in the nature, trigger, and location of disasters. There is sparse academic literature addressing consular incidents as a distinct type of emergency for governments (some notable exceptions include Drennan & McConnell, 2007; Lindström, 2009; Okano-Heijmans, 2010; Schwarz & McConnell, 2009). With the framework proposed below, we attempt to address this absence. The framework’s potential for practical utility is illustrated with more specific examples from the above cases. The intention of this article is not to compare the three cases and determine which event was handled best by which government. Rather, we apply public crisis management theory to the consular facet of the incidents outlined above to bring together elements common across very different consular emergencies. In doing so, we construct a framework that can facilitate a more systematic approach to assessing success and failure of consular emergency management efforts.2

2 A note on organisational learning: we acknowledge that each government’s response to these cases and incidents does not exist in isolation. The three governments’ responses in the Lebanon evacuations were no doubt informed by their experience in the tsunami 18 months prior, and the Bali bombings just over two years before that, as well as other events that have shaped and changed response procedures. While it is important to better understand the learning and implementation process that occurred in the wake of each incident and at the beginning of the next, that is neither the goal nor the intended contribution of this study.
2. Toward an evaluation framework

A crisis management perspective, adapted for consular emergency response operations, underpins the framework developed below. In summary, the work of Boin, 't Hart, Stern, and Sundelius (2005), Drennan and McConnell (2007) and Schwarz and McConnell (2009) was used to create an underlying foundation (Table 1, column 1), on which specificities of distance and internationalisation of the emergency response could be overlaid (Table 1, column 2), and aspects of response effectiveness and how these affect a government's ability to perform could be identified (Table 1, column 3). Boin et al.'s (2005) public crisis leadership framework was based on a comprehensive synthesis of the literature on emergency/crisis management. It discerns five crisis leadership challenges, the first three of which (sense making, meaning making and decision making/coordination) pertain to the acute emergency response phase. These have been adopted here.

Table 1
A conceptual framework for evaluating consular emergency management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key crisis response functions</th>
<th>As applied to consular emergencies</th>
<th>Indicators of consular emergency response performance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense making</td>
<td>A. Quickly and accurately establishing the magnitude and implications of a remote emergency</td>
<td>A1. Time lag between event occurrence and: (a) communication of consular facet to senior central policymakers and among the foreign ministry; (b) implementation of up-scaled response procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making and coordination</td>
<td>B. Decision making about the extent of government involvement and coordination of a geographically remote response operation as well as its domestic ramifications</td>
<td>B1. Timeliness and clarity of decisions regarding government support for citizens. A2. Degree of reliability (relevance, accuracy, comprehensiveness) of information provision to policymakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning making</td>
<td>C. Framing the events abroad for the domestic public and retaining/building credibility and trust in the government’s response</td>
<td>C1. Timeliness and degree of high-level leader presence and engagement C2. Tone of media coverage of consular emergency operations and implementation of a government media strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the operational environment</td>
<td>D. Conducting response operations in a foreign, sovereign country, and in an internationalised response environment</td>
<td>D1. Ability to gain access to, and coordinate with, host government(s) D2. Ability to coordinate with other foreign governments also involved in consular operations D3. Ability to coordinate with private and non-governmental actors involved in local emergency responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing mass information flows</td>
<td>E. Processing the mass of incoming messages from and to the government and theatre of action and managing the demand for information from the public</td>
<td>E1. Sufficiency of call centres and other forms of mass information collection E2. Ability to transfer information while handling personal data with sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging individuals in a mass event context</td>
<td>F. Providing targeted, multifaceted support to affected citizens locally and their families at home</td>
<td>F1. Capacity for holistic individualised needs assessment and service provision F2. Stakeholder assessments of quality of emergency assistance provision; frequency and ‘severity’ of individuals’ negative feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We have furthermore augmented them with three operational functions that are pivotal to what Drennan and McConnell (2007) label 'remote crisis management' in which governments respond to incidents that are 'politically remote', i.e., lacking political authority and operational capacity (see further Schwarz & McConnell, 2009). The operational response functions (managing the operational environment; handling mass information flows; and engaging individuals in a mass event context) are indeed tasks that need to be taken into consideration in general domestic crisis management. However, they take on particular significance in consular emergencies, which have to be managed outside sovereign territory, possibly at a significant distance, with fewer personnel and resources available on the ground.

What these six crisis response functions (Column 1) look like when applied to consular emergencies is laid out in Column 2, and operationalised into indicators of consular emergency response performance in Column 3. To demonstrate the relevance and versatility of the resulting framework, the crisis response functions and their performance indicators are elaborated upon below with empirical illustrations. However, given space constraints we can only elaborate on two of the strategic and two of the operational response functions.

We draw evidence from Australian, British and Swedish consular emergency responses during each incident. For each of the cases, all publicly available government documents were assembled and content-analysed. In addition, media coverage and academic publications were systematically scrutinised. Interviews were conducted with eighteen representatives of the consular branches of the Australian, British and Swedish foreign ministries, from February to June 2010. The interviewees are not quoted directly as the purpose was to ground the framework in a more nuanced understanding of consular emergency responses and the context of consular affairs within government, and below we present concise case vignettes rather than extensive case studies.

The empirical material presented below does not take the form of classic 'in depth' and holistic case study narratives, but instead is packaged as thematically relevant 'slices' (incidents, comparisons) selected for the purposes of illustrating the ability of the framework to interrogate and discriminate between different consular emergency response operations. The case studies from which they were derived have been explorative, as a Popperian 'context of discovery' (Popper, 1945) helping us to derive the framework.

The right-hand column of Table 1 provides indicators for the performance of national government actors during consular emergencies. These would most often include ministries of foreign affairs, but possibly more broadly include cabinet, head of government, and head of government's coordination department. These indicators are offered in the spirit of exploration. We do not presume our list is comprehensive, but we maintain that these are valid, relevant and in principle verifiable markers of the six performance parameters contained in the model. Below we demonstrate how these indicators may allow us to assess, compare and contrast consular crisis management performance across different consular cases.

3. Constructing the framework

3.1. Sense making

Sense making requires crisis managers to recognise that something out of the ordinary has occurred, to establish the nature of the crisis, to identify a wide range of possible courses of action and assess their likely consequences. Doing so reliably and robustly in a context of high time pressure, compromised channels of communication, deep uncertainty, and high levels of personal and public distress is a tall order, as amply documented in crisis research (Flin, 1996; Holsti, 1972; Lebow, 1981; Roberts, 1988; Turner & Pidgeon, 1997; Weick, 1995).

The time lag criterion (A1 in Table 1) is an indicator of how quickly the various arms of government (on-the-ground and at headquarters) begin to communicate and analyse the event in terms of its consular implications. It is not enough for news of the incident to simply circulate, especially as a disaster can simultaneously be a consular, humanitarian and national security emergency. News and preliminary information needs to be bundled, checked and targeted at the right spots in the institutional architecture.

It is not necessarily the on-the-ground arm of the foreign ministry that will notify the headquarters first. As the UK National Audit Office noted in its review of consular services, the embassy or consulate ‘may hear of a distressed British national from a range of sources, including friends, host country officials or from the individuals themselves’ (NAO, 2005: 6). For the Swedish embassy in Jakarta, the first that was heard of the nightclub bombings on Bali was a call from a reporter in Sweden 2 h after the blasts, requesting confirmation after reading of the incident on a news wire.
The time lag for the Australians was far smaller. News of the consular dimension of the Bali bombings reached the Australian Ambassador more rapidly, just minutes after the initial explosion (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007: 174) with the Consul-General ‘helping Australians at the scene within half an hour of the bombings’ (DFAT, 2003: 126; Gyngell & Wesley, 2007). Within an hour the consulate had provided the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) with a preliminary assessment. Although the Canberra-based crisis centre was activated just 3 h after the explosions (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007: 175), it did not initially contact other government agencies, most likely because ‘it was not believed that they would be involved in the incident at this stage’ (Brolen et al., 2007: 50). Staff notified the Australian foreign minister of the incident 3 h after it occurred and the Prime Minister was then notified 2 h later (Gyngell & Wesley, 2007: 177).

It is difficult to ascertain when up-scaling occurs after incident reports have started to come in as this can be broadly defined. Plans are understandably designed to deal with a wide variety of contingencies and therefore leave much room for interpretation. For example, the Australian ‘Response Plan for Mass Casualty Incidents Involving Australians Overseas’ simply states that ‘DFAT will make an initial assessment of the information received and determine whether to call an IDETF [Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force, used in major emergencies where a whole-of-government response is needed] to consider an appropriate response’ (version 1-2, p. 6). Following the tsunami, Australian policy makers were aware of an incident but ‘initial reports on casualties and damage were sketchy’ (Shergold, 2005: 44). They were yet to fully make sense of the extent of the incident but understood that it was worthy of up-scaling, as the decision to convene a meeting of the IDETF on the evening of Boxing Day, for the following morning suggests (Shergold, 2005: 44).

The same set of events triggered different sense-making processes in Stockholm, leading to major delays in informing key decision makers and in the commencement of up-scaling procedures. Indeed, the minister for international development was criticised for complicating her government’s sense-making process. Despite being the only minister at work on the day of the tsunami, she did not inform the foreign minister of the events, as she saw her main responsibility as one of managing humanitarian aid (Reuters, 2006). The Swedish Tsunami Commission, set up after much negative publicity about the government’s belated response to what turned out to be one of the country’s biggest mass-casualty disasters in living memory, found that while ‘everyone agrees that the level of ambition cannot be the same in distant countries as in the home country...it may still be established that Sweden asserted itself badly in essential respects in comparison with countries with more efficient crisis management’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005: 511).

A comparative time lag was noted by Lennquist and Hodge (2005: 34–5) who found that in contrast ‘to other European countries with injured citizens in the same area who deployed assessment teams on 26th December (Finland, Italy, Germany, United Kingdom), Sweden failed to deploy an assessment team until the evening of 29th December’. Even when the response procedure commenced, the time lag in understanding the magnitude and exceptional nature of the emergency persisted. The Swedish Tsunami Commission found that ‘consular support in the region was characterised by strict adhesion to the consular framework of rules without regard for the extraordinary situation’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005: 516).

Pro-active sense making can reduce the time lag in communication and up-scaling. Both the British and Australian embassies in Bangkok realised the need to gather on-the-ground information on the day the tsunami struck and rushed staff to Phuket, closer to the emergency (NAO & FCO, 2005: 11; Paterson, 2006: 4). In contrast, the failure to actively seek out on-site information was one of the key weaknesses in the Swedish Foreign Ministry’s response: ‘The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs...bears a major share of responsibility for the late response, inter alia by not having with his organisation actively sought information about the disaster and established contacts with other capitals at an early stage...He should furthermore have sought explanations as to why so many rang the Ministry and enquired about what they had to say. In that this did not take place, those responsible were not aware of the serious situation at an early stage’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005: 518). Conversely, active information exchange occurred on 13 July 2006, the day after the kidnapping that reignited the conflict in Lebanon, and the same day that Israel bombed the runway at Beirut airport. ‘EU member states had their first consular telephone conference at capital level. These were subsequently held on a daily basis’ (MFA Sweden, 2006: 7). The Swedish government – presumably keen to better itself in the wake of the politically disastrous judgment of the independent commission investigating its Tsunami response – was later held up as an example of a rapid pro-active response and contrasted with, for example, the Canadian government, which was at least three days behind Sweden in their evacuation from Lebanon (Di Nino & Stollery, 2007: 4).

The reliability criterion (A2) is a necessary complement to the assessment of speed. The tension between these two indicators is palpable in practice. Following the Bali bombnings an aeromedical evacuation operation was launched.
from Australia on the basis of an estimate of just five Australian casualties. This meant they were initially under equipped (though able to rapidly reinforce when a more accurate picture emerged) (Broen et al., 2007: 63–4).

Tools to assist the production of accurate data such as registration databases are still highly reliant on the public and are rarely reliable in the immediate aftermath of any incident. Within a week of the escalation of the conflict in Lebanon the number of Australians registered with the embassy in Beirut jumped from 2500 to more than 12,000 with some cases proving to be 'dual registrations, or identities and whereabouts given by third parties that proved to be incorrect' (Dudgeon, 2006: 24).

As well as accuracy of the information they are receiving, government officials also need to be aware of the comprehensiveness and potential gaps (silences) in the bigger picture. Following the tsunami, the UK FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) acted very rapidly and mobilised a consular Rapid Deployment Team (RDT) from London to Sri Lanka on 26 December, which arrived on 27 December and was reinforced by a further four officers on 29 December (NAO and FCO, 2005: 13). This action was based on information coming in from Sri Lanka, which included reports of washed out roads and downed bridges near Colombo. At that time, reports of infrastructure conditions near the embassy in Bangkok, Thailand were more favourable. However, the largest concentrations of British tourists affected were in harder to reach coastal resorts in Thailand, which delayed accurate on-the-ground assessments. The consequence of acting rapidly by sending a RDT to Sri Lanka meant that a complete RDT could not be deployed to Thailand until the following week (NAO and FCO, 2005: 15).

3.2. Decision making and coordination

Throughout the management of any emergency response operation, coordinated choices are required, and the quality of crisis decision-making is likely to be highly correlated with the overall response effectiveness (Herek, Janis, & Huth, 1987; Schafer & Crichlow, 2010; Tetlock, Peterson, McGuire, Chang, & Feld, 1992). One overriding decision that has to be made in each consular emergency is the extent to which the government should become involved, how much support should be offered to families at the time and in the future, and how the response should be funded. Strategic coordination of responses within government and with external partners requires a combination of calling on pre-established relationships and networks, as well as the ability to recognise and exploit new opportunities for mutually beneficial joint action. Crises can make coordination more difficult through confusion, pressure and communication breakdowns; but they can also help foster an atmosphere of cooperation which temporarily mutes departmental conflict and overrides departmental cultural differences (Hillyard, 2000; Moynihan, 2009).

The criterion of timeliness and clarity of intervention decisions (B1) refers to the fact that while regular consular assistance is provided to individuals with the requirement that they pay for the service or reimburse the government (usually through travel insurance), this is a more convoluted issue in large-scale emergencies. As a comparative study of the Lebanon evacuations noted, 'one of the larger policy issues that came under scrutiny was the standard policy of having a citizen repay any monies spent by the government in the individual's extraction efforts. . . Several countries first announced that citizens would be obligated to repay the cost of evacuation, only to rescind the policy when faced with harsh media criticism and comparison to other countries policies' (WorldReach, 2007: 2).

Government decisions about scoping their support can be highly consequential and costly, and cannot be made lightly. The British FCO maintained following the tsunami that they should 'retain the ability to review which support mechanisms are appropriate after each and every mass incident, rather than automatically applying a standard package of assistance' (NAO, 2005: 49). Moreover, the timing of and announcement of such decisions are important both internally (administrative processes) and externally (public relations). These difficulties were recognised as a lesson for the Australian government following the Bali bombings. The 'ex gratia payments by the Australian Government...are covered neither by legislation or regulation. Such payments require written authority, normally from the prime minister. However, Australian government agencies need to understand how these payments will be handled where a decision and announcement has been made at the ministerial level, but corresponding authorisations are not yet available' (Management Advisory Committee, 2004: 117).

Regarding the timeliness of the announcement, in response to the tsunami on 26 December, the British government announced its support package on 29 December, three days after the wave struck, and then took additional time to actually start providing the support promised under the package. Internally, this time lag produced uncertainty over what assistance consular staff could provide and the level of expenses which could be incurred (NAO, 2005: 49); externally, relatives and friends of victims were frustrated about the wait in the interim period (NAO and Zito Trust,
2006: 7). This uncertainty prompted criticisms in the media which drew unfavourable comparisons with foreign governments (NAO, 2005: 49).

Financial management issues played into this situation arising. The FCO found after the Bali bombings that their ‘budgets were insufficient to meet the extraordinary costs arising from essential support provided after the attack’ (FCO, 2004: 120). It subsequently introduced the so-called ‘emergency consular premium’ on passport licensing fees. In a move clearly designed to sidestep the rigours and red tape of ‘business as usual’ budgetary politics, these proceeds were to be transferred ‘directly to the FCO from the UK Passport Service – not through the Treasury – thereby introducing a greater element of budgetary control’ and ensure an ‘emergency and disaster reserve’ (FCO, 2004).

Criterion B2 concerns the degree of intragovernmental alignment between different forms of emergency responses. Potential alignment challenges are particularly notable in three arenas: within the foreign ministry, between departments, and in overarching whole-of-government coordination. As to the former, the Swedish Tsunami Commission found that there had been unsatisfactory communication from the embassy in Thailand to Stockholm in the early stages of the emergency. ‘On the first night after his arrival in Phuket, [the] Ambassador... should not have been satisfied with following the ordinary routines but should have contacted the State Secretary or the Minister for Foreign Affairs directly to inform them of the gravity of the situation, the measures he planned to take and the acute need of personnel reinforcements’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005: 515). However, embassy officials on their part experienced difficulties in aligning their actions to departmental ones when the senior leadership in Stockholm was not engaged. In the Swedish foreign ministry ‘both the Head of Group and the Head of Department began work on Boxing Day but by telephone from a distance. As a result, management of efforts at the Ministry was weak for more than a day. Not until the head of a department is physically present can any really effective build-up of activities... be secured in the initial phase of a crisis such as this’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005: 513). Despite the post-Tsunami lesson-drawing exercises that had gone on, there continued to be a low level of alignment between responders in the field during the Swedish evacuations from Lebanon. Without a Swedish embassy in Lebanon, personnel deployed to Beirut should have officially been under the orders of the Embassy in Syria, but instead coordinated directly and almost solely with Stockholm (MFA Sweden, 2006: 11).

Issues with alignment of response in the field were also present in the British response to the tsunami. After a Rapid Deployment Team was sent from London to Sri Lanka, some embassy staff reported that they had not been made aware of the role and responsibilities of the RDT. They had been unclear whether the remit of the RDT was to command and control, or to assist and advise in the response to the crisis. The RDT had consequently charted its own course and had not sought the assistance of staff with local knowledge of the region (NAO and FCO, 2005: 16). In the Australian evacuations from Lebanon, the approach taken to improve on-the-ground coordination and communication among foreign ministry staff and with other departments was to begin each day with an ‘all agencies’ coordination and tasking meeting. This enabled daily situation reports to be provided to Canberra to assist the DFAT crisis centre in monitoring overall strategy and resources. Throughout each day, ‘the office fielded enquiries, channeled communication from officers in dispersed locations, input data into the consular database and dealt with logistics, such as transport’ (Paterson, 2006: 6).

3.3. Meaning making and managing the operational environment

Given space constraints, the third strategic response function, meaning making, and the first of the three operational response functions, managing the operational environment, cannot be elaborated upon in any depth here. Meaning making is the process of framing an emergency event and its implications for the public. It is a crucial ‘battleground’ between government actors and their critics. Depending on who manages to communicate their own interpretations of the events most persuasively to the public, the authority and legitimacy of crisis response operations and the key actors involved in them can be significantly enhanced or diminished (Boin, ‘t Hart, & McConnell, 2009; Brändström, Kuipers, & Daleus, 2008). Meaning making involves both deliberate speech acts but also involves other forms of leadership performance, for example, through meetings with families of victims, rituals of mourning, demonstrations, or public visits to the scene of the disaster (Hajer, 2009; ‘t Hart, 1993). These are three highly relevant parameters of any crisis management operation, but as Table 1 suggests they take on a different emphasis when the emergency is located abroad, and the ability to make sense of the crisis, frame the crisis and coordinate the response is affected by the internationalisation of the emergency.

The fourth response function is managing the operational environment. As Drennan and McConnell (2007) point out, consular crisis responders have little control over the operational environment. Having to act on foreign soil they
cannot fall back on formal authority. They have to rely strongly on diplomacy and the knowledge and contacts of local officials. They face logistical challenges: limited interoperability of systems, difference in time zones, cultural sensitivities, and chronic shortages of resources and personnel, as well as constantly changing conditions and knock-on effects resulting from decisions made by other governments and private actors. In these conditions they need to be able to gain functional access to the host government(s), to coordinate with other responding governments, private organisations and non-governmental actors.

3.4. Managing mass information flows

The second of the operational parameters of consular crisis management refers to the ability to handle high-volume information flows. In times of crisis, many individuals and agencies have information, and many others are desperate for it. It is necessary to keep ‘connecting the dots’ effectively in the face of an emergency. But what Fritz and Mathewson (1957) (see further Scanlon, 1992) describe as ‘informational convergence’ in disaster situations puts significant pressure on the surge capacity of communications infrastructure and staff to collect and disseminate information. The pressure of informational convergence and consequences of overload, during consular emergencies, was aptly illustrated by Scanlon (2007) in his study of nine foreign governments’ post-tsunami emergency call centres.

Criterion E1 (see Table 1) emphasises the importance of having sufficient procedures and capacity in place to process the masses of information. As Scanlon (2007) demonstrated, not doing so stifled information flows that were essential to the consular response. It also angered and upset members of the public who were unable to access widely publicised but overloaded call centres to inquire about or report details of a family member in the affected area. An indicator of a government’s ability to manage mass information flows is the functional operation of one or more call centres. This is achieved by increasing the day-to-day call handling capacity of the foreign ministry, either through an increase in call handlers or by outsourcing call handling to another government department with existing infrastructure, as well as effectively recording and managing details that may be incomplete or duplicated by several callers.

The Bali bombings resulted in the death of 88 Australians, nonetheless ‘the department’s Emergency Call Unit handled over 30,000 telephone calls in the first days of the crisis and recorded details of almost 5000 individuals for whom family members or friends had concerns’ (DFAT, 2003: 131). Immediately following the tsunami, 85,000 calls were received (DFAT, 2005: 151). Even with additional call handlers, a glitch or breakdown in the system can have immediate and far-reaching consequences. In Scanlon’s (2007) study of government call centres, he found that the Canadian and Dutch systems were more desirable. These systems utilised computer-based software, designed specially for recording details of consular cases, that was accessible abroad at the embassies. He also found that a back-up system for the call centre (utilised in Australia but not in Sweden) was desirable as this reduced the likelihood of unmanageable overload. The UK was roundly criticised for its overloaded system (NAO and FCO, 2005: 7).

A post-tsunami House of Commons inquiry (2006: Ev2) assessed the London-based call centre as inadequate, suffering major breakdowns, and collecting poor information. The overloaded call centre also severely affected operations at the Bangkok embassy. With staff deployed to Phuket, the embassy was already struggling to handle calls and emails from within Thailand. When the London-based call centre malfunctioned, the embassy received a high volume of calls from the UK. Embassy staff received 6,452 calls the day following the tsunami. Consequently, in the first day of the emergency, emails went unchecked and were later found to contain important details of highly impacted areas (NAO and FCO, 2005: 12).

As well as ability to up-scale call centre capacity, another key aspect of Criterion E1 is the sufficiency of the individual call handlers to collect details, and to manage the information and the callers. In the UK during the tsunami response the need for call handlers was so great that the Police deployed operators ‘some of whom had little or no experience in this type of call handling, and had received little training. As a result, the initial information taken by some operators was insufficient. . . . There were inaccuracies in people’s names and addresses, understandable given the massive volumes, but it still caused difficulties’ (NAO and FCO, 2005: 8). Similarly for Sweden ‘the routines for registering missing persons were undeveloped and in some cases led to serious mistakes’ (Katastrofkommission, 2005: 510).

Increasing the ability of call centre staff is achieved through training prior to the emergency, but also rapid training during the emergency. After major inadequacies in the Swedish tsunami response, there were concerted efforts to assist call handlers in the ever-changing situation. During the evacuation from Lebanon the Swedish foreign ministry call handlers received a ‘major briefing before each daytime telephone shift [and] a general picture of developments was given, information about the evacuation situation, planned transports, websites, SMS and information about policy
matters... Between the briefings, the Press and Information Department’s information sheets were regularly distributed to the telephone answering service. Furthermore, about every fourth hour, the transport group’s lists of departures and arrivals for flights/buses/ships were spread’ (MFA Sweden, 2006: 15–6).

In parallel with the high-volume collection of information regarding individuals in need of assistance, the second criterion (E2) is the ability of consular and other government personnel to transfer citizen data between responders and handle personal information with sensitivity. The ability of responders to fulfil this criterion is largely contingent upon the mode of data collection and data transfer, and how responders navigate the delicate balance between protecting an individual’s privacy and obstructing the capacity to assist that individual. Ineffective information sharing hinders the response and imbues frustration in those the government is trying to assist. This frustration was expressed by British survivors of the tsunami who received ‘multiple requests from different directions to supply similar or duplicate information, reflecting in part a general practice among agencies not to pool or share their information, and in part informal data gathering in affected areas by volunteers’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 11). As one survivor recalled, ‘about 30 people came round to take my name to put on the “safe list” yet I still never got my name on the list’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 31).

Ineffective intra-governmental information sharing led to misunderstandings, for example, when the lists of missing citizens were not effectively collated. During the tsunami response, the British embassy in Jakarta only became aware of a British police presence in the region after the police had departed. Furthermore, the police officers had produced a distinct (and differing) shortlist of citizens thought to be missing in Indonesia (NAO and FCO, 2005: 26). The transfer of information can be hindered by adherence to paper-based modes of information collection. As observed during the 2006 evacuations, ‘many countries did not have access to any electronic means of capturing pertinent information on citizens boarding boats. For most, a simple handwritten list acted as the official passenger manifest... Issues such as poor handwriting, fax and scan quality impacted the ability of crisis headquarters to understand the information’ (WorldReach, 2007: 3).

Along with effective transfer of information, the second criterion is concerned with responders’ understanding of privacy protocols and the limitations on sharing citizen information, even if such sharing is likely to assist the citizen in distress. This internal information transfer issue identified in Australia’s response to the Bali bombings led to the recommendation that agencies ‘adopt a common approach to the Privacy Act and to have a shared understanding of the way the Act applies against their operations during crisis. Differing interpretations of the Act may lead to inconsistent policy formulation and agency responses during the crisis’ (Management Advisory Committee, 2004: 192). Regarding external sharing, two weeks after the tsunami, Australia, Denmark and Norway had published their lists of missing persons, but Canada, Sweden and the United States were still deciding whether they should, or even could, publish theirs (Cheadle, 2005). Questions remained over what was allowed given privacy legislation, and concerns that publishing details of the missing would cause further distress to families and open up the possibility of criminals abusing the information.

3.5. Engaging individuals in a mass event context

A final operational challenge in a consular emergency is to engage individual citizens that require assistance and their families and provide logistical as well as psychological and emotional support. Much consular emergency assistance takes the form of logistical support to those citizens and their families, such as arranging evacuation, medical care, or circumnavigating any host-government red tape and administration. Assistance has to be delivered against the background of a general expectation of compassion, emotional support, and a willingness to walk the extra mile on behalf of stricken compatriots. Coming up with tailor-made approaches catering to needs of the individual victims and families beyond basic logistical assistance is particularly challenging when so many have been affected.

In a large-scale incident an immediate priority is how to scale up responses, such as running call centres able to handle tens of thousands of calls following the tsunami, or handling the logistics of evacuating thousands from Lebanon. However, beneath those big numbers sit individuals and families with differing needs and coping capacities. As such, one of the indicators of an effective large-scale consular response is the capacity for holistic individualised needs assessment and service provision (criterion F1).

The needs assessment criterion reflects the importance of direct contact between affected citizens and consular officials, provided it is managed well. This was not always the case. Eighty percent of Swedish patients surveyed reported that contact with the embassy following the tsunami was perceived as necessary, but rated their satisfaction
with this element as 1.3 (unsatisfied) on a 5-point scale (Lennquist & Hodgetts, 2005: 41). The NAO and Zito Trust (2006: 27) found that many British survivors interviewed ‘had been bedridden, some alone, and they were reliant on officials visiting the hospital. When they managed to speak with officials some reported that their manner was cold and they had little information to share’. Well-managed contact with officials involved in the response in contrast provided reassurance and familiarity—both a practical and an emotional link to home. Lennquist and Hodgetts (2005: 33) noted that during the tsunami many of those affected had lost their mobile phones, and criticised the ‘limited visibility of Embassy staff at the hospitals, who would have been a channel for patients to relay a message to next of kin’. Indeed, British survivors of the tsunami ‘described how reassuring it was to talk to people who spoke English, how invaluable individuals were who could translate and how indebted they felt to those who provided access to a phone to talk with loved ones’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 27).

Yet, it is logistically difficult for consular staff to provide personalised support to each individual in a mass emergency. One approach to deal with this dilemma has been for foreign ministries to engage government, non-government and private actors to assist with the emotional support and counselling in the field. A week after the tsunami, the FCO deployed a team of British Red Cross volunteers to Thailand ‘to provide professional emotional support and signposting’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 25).

The second criterion is stakeholder assessments of quality of emergency assistance provision (F2). Even when it is understood that consular officials were under a great deal of pressure, there is a generalised expectation of compassion. The NAO and Zito Trust found that following the British response to the tsunami, ‘the provision of emotional support over the first few days was rated as ineffective’ (2006: 26) and conversely, ‘being treated sensitively as an individual was key to all positive feedback about agency contact’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 8). Moreover, they found that ‘it is examples of insensitive and thoughtless interactions which have stayed most vividly in people’s minds’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 67). Yet with so many individuals caught in a stressful situation the stakeholder assessment can vary greatly. During the Swedish evacuations from Lebanon ‘some were grateful to escape from the war, while others complained about the conditions around them. These were hallmarks of the work on Cyprus: frustration, anger, accusations of different sorts and unpleasant verbal attacks—but also friendly smiles and much gratitude to the personnel there and to Sweden’ (Kulling & Sigurdsson, 2008: 58).

It appears that stakeholder assessments of quality of assistance were not simply a function of individuals’ objective needs but were mitigated by what they deemed reasonable care in the circumstances. Stakeholder assessments were made within the international context of the emergency and were influenced by on the ground comparisons. Interviews conducted by the NAO and Zito Trust (2006: 7) indicated that citizens did not expect on-the-ground assistance within the first hours or even days of the tsunami. Expectations were raised as visible support was provided to other foreign citizens by their respective governments. As recounted by a British survivor: ‘I was definitely aware that compared to other people from other countries I wasn’t really getting much attention. There were representatives, I think, for the Dutch, Swedish, French Governments wandering round’. According to another, ‘most embassies were there. When I say that, I mean Swedish, French or Australian, you know, and so we didn’t know what had happened. The Australian Embassy at that point took control of us and told us what was happening because the British Embassy hadn’t arrived. They were like, “we don’t know where your Embassy is, they should be on their way” but they were nowhere to be seen’ (NAO and Zito Trust, 2006: 27, 31). The stakeholder assessment of the situation is based on visibility of assistance and the manner in which it is delivered. Negative assessments, even unrepresentative individual assessments, when amplified by the news media can colour public perceptions of the entire foreign ministry or government response. The provision of multifaceted assistance that incorporates compassion and emotional support, that goes beyond logistical or transport assistance, is a necessary task during consular emergencies.

4. Concluding reflections

At the outset of the article an evaluative framework was put forward as a tool to deconstruct and assess government responses to large-scale consular emergencies. It consisted of six crisis response tasks drawn from the crisis management literature and adapted specifically for consular emergencies, due to the exceptional dynamics in which national citizens are the targets of assistance but outside the national borders. Each of these performance dimensions was then further operationalised into criteria which could be used as indicators of consular response performance. Assessing or evaluating government performance is not a clear-cut task, even with unambiguous policy goals or outcome-based programs (see further, McConnell, 2010). It is particularly difficult to characterise a crisis response as a
whole as it often results in distilling a complex multi-agency and multi-national event into overall judgment of success or failure.

The framework developed here is therefore not intended as a checklist of sufficient conditions for a ‘successful’ consular response, and does not claim to be comprehensive. Rather, this framework provides a way to break down the emergency response into somewhat more measurable units. We can see that despite the very different triggers, locations and circumstances of the three events discussed in this study, there are challenges common to each consular event. By spotlighting these six particular response functions and operationalising performance domains for consular crisis management, we constructed a systematic, focused, and policy relevant means for evaluating consular emergency response operations.

It is also worth noting that performance in one of the crisis response functions can affect the ability to perform in others. Mass information management on-the-ground (and in call centres) affected situational awareness and the ability to make sense of events abroad. The international operational environment opened up opportunities but also presented barriers to effective meaning making and coordination implementation. Engagement with citizens that was perceived as insensitive or uncompassionate fed into negative publicity, which presented competing frames from the press corp. Compassionate engagement, and effective coordination provided positive stories for positive framing by politicians and the foreign ministry media teams. The relativities of assessment came through loud and clear in the present study.

For example, an efficient operational move such as utilising another responding country’s consular officers or resources to assist nationals can lead to negative publicity and criticism in the political arena as it appears that citizens are not receiving assistance from their own government. Also, following the widely and publicly criticised Swedish response to the tsunami, the Swedish media were initially in a critical frame of mind with regard to the Lebanon response. However, they were forced to shift their view as the response received praise from evacuees returning to Sweden and positive comparisons in the international news media. Also, in some areas, harsh trade-offs are unavoidable. For example, in making public the lists of missing citizens, the potential distress to families and threat to privacy and property has to be weighed against the need to receive feedback and be able to speedily gain a more robust understanding of the scope of victimisation, all the while remaining within scope of legal restrictions and privacy legislation. What is the ‘right’ choice in such a dilemma? We do not deny the existence of such trade-offs, but hope that our offering of a coherent general criteria set provides the basis for a more systematic and nuanced assessment of government performance in an area where fleeting impressions and media bias often dominate the public discussion.

References


Large-Scale Consular Emergency Response Revisited

1. The challenge of large-scale consular emergency response

Large-scale consular emergency response is a public sector crisis management challenge that crosses geographical and administrative boundaries. These emergencies are international, not simply because one country’s citizens are affected by a disaster in a foreign country. They are truly international because when a large number of one country’s citizens are affected by a disaster abroad it is likely that a number of foreign nationals from several countries have been affected. Rosenthal and Kouzmin observed in 1993 that ‘the traditional distinction between domestic and international categories of contingencies and crises is rapidly losing relevance’ and large-scale crises ‘tend to be transnational’ (Rosenthal and Kouzmin 1993, p. 2). The growing body of literature on transboundary crises supports this notion (see especially, ‘t Hart, Heyse and Boin 2001, p. 182; Boin and Rhinard 2008; Ansell, Boin and Keller 2010). These trends in the study of crisis management are reflected in the concept of large-scale consular emergency response, in which a government’s domestic bureaucracy is enacted both domestically and internationally to assist citizens outside the national territory.

This concluding chapter of the exegesis draws together the various findings and lessons learned throughout the study of three foreign ministries’ responses to three consular events. This dissertation has been undertaken using theory and principles from the scholarly study of public sector crisis management. In turn, this dissertation has contributed to the public administration and crisis management literature through the examination of a specific class of emergency that is part of governments’ crisis management repertoire. Addressing the overall research question of this dissertation, this concluding chapter will reflect on how governments and in particular foreign ministries
respond to incidents abroad affecting a large number of foreign nationals; what strategic and operational challenges they face in implementing these responses; and how the 'consular' nature of this class of emergency, spanning the domestic and international arena, shapes these challenges and response patterns. This chapter pulls together the different threads of the five preceding journal articles and builds upon the five studies to provide a greater narrative about the implications of each major component of large-scale consular emergency response. Based on the event cases and foreign ministries studied in this dissertation, this concluding chapter will take in turn three characteristics of large-scale consular emergency response and reflect on what we can learn about this class of emergency.

The 'consular' characteristics, which manifest in expressions of national identity and the link between citizens and the state in the international arena, will be addressed in section 2 of this chapter. Section 3 will reflect on the 'large-scale' nature of the incidents, and how consular responses become an undertaking in trying to manage the diversity and volume of assistance requests in these infrequent and suddenly occurring events. Through several major consular incidents government responses have reacted to and engaged with techno-social changes and have evolved to become a greater part of the foreign ministry skill set. This 'response' component of large-scale consular emergencies will be considered in section 4. The final section of this concluding exegesis chapter will look forward and consider future directions and priorities for scholars and practitioners of large-scale consular emergency response.

2. Large-scale consular emergency response: Citizens abroad

National identity and citizenship

When disaster strikes or conflict erupts somewhere in the world, inevitably domestic news agencies will ask foreign ministries if any citizens are known to have been affected. The greater the number of citizens involved or the more tragic the circumstances, the more newsworthy the incident becomes domestically. This interest in compatriots can be understood from a number of perspectives and has been explored in various disciplines. In nationalism studies it can be viewed as a facet of Anderson’s (1983) ‘imagined political community’ in which individuals feel intrinsically linked to members of the same nation even though they are unlikely to ever meet. In political philosophy
it can be seen as partiality or obligation towards compatriots (Goodin 1988; Miller 1988; Mason 1997; Wellman 2001; Brock 2005; Miller 2005; Veen 2008; Lazar 2010). In political psychology it can be viewed through the lens of social identity theory in which individuals derive part of their identity from the concept that they are members of a particular group, in this case the nation (see Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Schatz and Lavine 2007). The cases studied in this dissertation illustrate a consequence of this sentiment. The pressure on governments and their foreign ministries to provide adequate assistance originates not only from the friends and relatives of those under threat but also from compatriots.

Despite the movement of people around the world in greater numbers, national citizenship remains a relevant concept for many when under threat. Even when citizens are outside national territory, there remains an expectation by many that the government has a role in assisting citizens in need. Due to the international context, these expectations manifest differently in consular emergencies than observed in more traditional domestically located emergencies. The responses take on a greater national identity dimension and incorporate national symbolism and comparisons with other countries' responses (see ‘t Hart 1993 for a discussion of the symbolic dimension of crisis management). Although the primary concern for many in distress is practical assistance, the reassurance provided by this national dimension of the response is also reported. This symbolic crisis management to a certain extent constrains more practical assistance strategies that may be provided, for example, through cooperation between countries responding to the disaster. International travel is becoming available to a wider population. With this, an implication of the continued connection between the state and the citizen is that governments need to continually reconceptualise and adapt to relationships in which citizens are both ‘taxpayers’ and ‘nationals’.

The international arena

The speed and ease of scaling up a response is not simply a matter of geography or kilometres, but from a logistical standpoint, how rapidly personnel nearest to the affected area can be reinforced. In the cases studied, reinforcement was easiest when military assets were available nearby, for example, the Australian government’s use of Australian military resources in the 2002 Bali bombing response or the UK government’s use of British
military assets during the 2006 evacuations from Lebanon. On-the-ground responses are generally reinforced by sending personnel from nearby embassies and consulates and rapidly deploying personnel from the foreign ministry and other government departments' headquarters. The three foreign ministries studied in this dissertation developed a number of strategies to facilitate rapid reinforcement, such as training personnel for rapid consular response teams and making administrative changes to methods of rapidly contacting deployable personnel. Even when a foreign ministry has a sizeable embassy near the disaster zone, large-scale consular emergencies by definition, dwarf the response capacity of the immediately located personnel and resources.

The country in which the disaster or conflict is located also makes a difference to the consular response challenges. In general, the more developed the crisis management function of the host government, the less extensive the assistance provided by foreign governments and the less demand there is for consular assistance. Foreign ministries will usually face fewer and less-severe challenges when a major disaster or conflict occurs in a rich, safe and well-governed (Wildavsky 1988) host country. This does not mean that consular assistance is not required in the most developed countries or that a consular response operation will necessarily run smoothly. For instance, a disaster in the United States such as Hurricane Katrina created a security situation in New Orleans that required a significant consular response from many governments. When US government officials refused foreign government officials access to parts of the disaster zone to assist their nationals jurisdictional disagreements ensued (see further, Ulrich 2007). However, in ‘richer and safer’ countries, foreign nationals are more likely to be able to extricate themselves from a dangerous situation. Even in large and severe disasters, there may not be a significant demand for assistance if possible modes of evacuation such as commercial flights are still functioning. Moreover, the host government will be more likely to have the capacity to assist foreign nationals alongside their own citizens.

Government action: Necessary but not sufficient

Foreign ministries treat consular assistance during large-scale disasters as a legitimate crisis management function of government. While foreign ministries are central to mounting a major consular response, given the magnitude of the disaster, foreign ministries responses alone are not sufficient. In general, consular responses can be improved for both citizens and
governments through strategic engagement with private industry, for instance, by collaborating with experts in particular areas of disaster response such as Disaster Victim Identification (DVI), or with companies that manage the movement of people internationally such as travel agencies and airlines. Working with NGOs can also provide citizens with more personalised attention or care.

Coordination and cooperation in the international arena results in various opportunities for burden-sharing and information exchange (see Hillyard 2000). However, the state remains best placed to assist citizens in distress, albeit augmented by other actors. States must play a role in the response. Only states can issue emergency travel documents (Okano-Heijmans 2011, p. 31), and under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, states have greater diplomatic access to other national governments – both the host government and other responding governments. Foreign ministries generally have the resources and authority to lead a whole-of-government response and access a wider range of resources from government. Moreover, in large-scale consular emergencies, there is an expectation by many citizens and sections of the media that a national response will be implemented. Collaboration with other responding governments, private industry and non-governmental organisations can augment a national response. However, when a national consular response is perceived to be ineffective, public and media criticism is often directed at the government, and not other governments that assisted with the consular response (see Boin, McConnell and 't Hart 2008 for an extensive examination of post-crisis blame management).

Other governments' consular actions

Recent years have seen greater cooperation between foreign ministries in relation to consular crisis preparedness and information sharing, for example, among European Union member states (see further, Lindström 2009; EC 2011). However, this cooperation has not yet reached the stage of formal coordinated on-the-ground action. This does not mean that government representatives on the ground will help only their own national citizens. Often it is not practical to try to separate nationalities, and consular assistance will often be provided to other foreign nationals at the same time. Moreover, nationality is not a straightforward issue. Many individuals hold multiple nationalities, and may also be eligible for consular assistance if they have
residency or are married to a citizen (see further, Boll 2007, pp. 116-21). However, as consular assistance remains a national competency and responses are therefore initiated nationally, this cooperation remains largely ad hoc and is often organised during the response operations.

Even when not attempting to coordinate with other foreign governments, their presence and actions can affect the response. For example, responding governments may compete for resources or inspire comparisons in relation to the level or speed of other governments' actions. Consistency in delivery of consular services is a core objective of foreign ministries such as the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (see for example, FCO 2007; FCO 2010). However, consistency is more difficult to achieve during emergency responses partly because of the numbers needing assistance and the non-routine nature of the consular decisions and actions. Another factor in the visible lack of consistency in consular assistance is due to the inevitable differences between what one government can do for their citizens compared to another. These discrepancies are not always within the control of the foreign ministries. For instance, in the Disaster Victim Identification process following mass casualty disasters such as the tsunami, the ease and speed of identification depends on the quality of antemortem data. Countries such as Sweden that hold extensive dental records or blood samples of their citizenry can more easily provide this type of data (Scanlon 2009, p. 109).

Establishing limits to consular assistance

An all-encompassing definition of a large-scale consular emergency is problematic as the circumstances of consular emergencies vary significantly. However, a large-scale consular emergency can be characterised as a situation that presents a risk to the safety or wellbeing of a large number of foreign nationals; a situation in which foreign nationals cannot get themselves out of danger without assistance; or when the demand on resources or infrastructure (such as transport or medical care) is so high that a coordinated whole-of-government response will be more likely to ensure citizens' wellbeing. Determining whether an incident warrants a large-scale consular response and becomes a whole-of-government response depends not simply on numbers affected, but also on the threat to citizens, the depth of disruption, and the severity of the threat (Rosenthal et al. 1989). For many foreign ministries, mass inconvenience, even in large numbers does not warrant a large-scale consular
emergency response. For example, in Europe in 2010 the airspace shutdown due to volcanic ash did not lead to a large-scale consular operation for most European governments with stranded travellers.

When a consular response is underway, a primary objective is to remove citizens from danger, but to do so within the legal and administrative constraints on the government. Foreign ministries, and governments more broadly, are in a difficult position when attempting to define the limits of their responsibility and the extent of citizens’ personal responsibility. The government consular response is constrained by the conditions of foreign countries’ laws and protocol. In very large-scale incidents however, the enormity of the disaster can also allow for greater flexibility. For example, following the Indian Ocean tsunami it was possible for some foreign nationals who had lost their passports and official papers to exit the disaster-struck country and enter their home country – an action that would not generally have been permitted (FCO 1, 21 May). The Australian, British and Swedish foreign ministries have moved to further clarify large-scale consular response conditions to the public. For example, the 2011 Review of FCO Consular Evacuation Procedures stated that the UK is unlikely to charter evacuation flights when commercial flights are still available. The Swedish Act (2010:813) on Consular Disaster Response states that citizens receiving assistance may be liable for costs incurred in the consular responses. But even with this attempt to clarify limits, section 7 of the Act states that this liability still ‘may be adjusted or waived if there are special grounds for this in view of ... the circumstances in general’.

In the three foreign ministries studied in this dissertation, policy regarding reimbursement for large-scale consular emergency response was not as strict as for individual consular assistance. In part this reflects the practicalities and delays that would be incurred by, for example, requiring all evacuees to sign a promissory note while trying to exit a disaster zone (MFA Sweden 2006, p. 31). It also reflects the politics and negative publicity associated with appearing to fail or refuse to assist victims of highly publicised terrorist attacks and natural disasters. Nonetheless, public expectations of these services may reflect the

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12 Interviews with foreign ministry officials are numbered in the order that they appear in this chapter, and not by the order in which they were conducted. All interviews were conducted in 2010. For information on the interview methodology, see the introductory chapter of this dissertation.
lack of prominent examples or public discussions of repayment or limitations on assistance. Given the variety of circumstances presented by a large-scale consular emergency, it is in the interest of policy makers to retain autonomy over the extent of the response and decisions regarding which provisions will be made available. However, by stating (and repeatedly demonstrating) that 'assistance' will be provided in crises, but not clearly defining what this means, when a disaster occurs 'assistance' is left open to interpretation and contestation by various parties such as the government, the media, and the citizenry (see Boin, 't Hart, Stern and Sundelius 2005 for a discussion of meaning making, pp. 69-90; see Boin, 't Hart and McConnell 2009 for a discussion of framing contests).

3. Large-scale consular emergency response: The limits of response capacity

Large-scale and high-profile

To increase foreign ministry capacity in large-scale events it is beneficial for non-consular foreign ministry personnel to have an understanding of consular work, processes and principles. Likewise, it is valuable for consular personnel to understand how the work of other government departments, such as social services, slots into the overall consular response (Paul 2005), and to conduct joint training exercises with, for example, the defence department and military (FCO 2008, p. 43). Within foreign ministries and within the government more broadly, large-scale consular emergencies draw attention to the consular assistance function of government and raise the profile of consular assistance. The 2002 Bali bombings, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and 2006 evacuations from Lebanon and other consular incidents such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, all contributed to an increased awareness of, and preparedness for, large-scale consular events. For the Australian foreign ministry, the 2002 Bali bombings was instrumental in raising the profile of consular emergency management (see DFAT 2003, pp. 121-22). The Bali bombings did lead to changes in the UK, such as the creation of Rapid Deployment Teams. However, for Sweden and the UK it was the severity of the Indian Ocean tsunami that put en-masse consular assistance in the spotlight and prompted rapid reforms and an increased focus on 'best practices' and service delivery (see NAO 2005; SOU 2005).
An implication of the raised profile of consular assistance within the foreign ministry has been the higher value placed on the consular skill set. Consular assistance has also attracted a higher calibre of leadership and personnel (Okano-Heijmans 2011, pp. 27-28). A greater emphasis on preparedness and training for large-scale events also draws attention to the crisis manager role that high-level policymakers may have to assume in an emergency (see Boin and 't Hart 2010, p. 368). Moreover, because consular services is generally the closest contact that constituents will have with the foreign ministry, consular emergencies also raise the profile of consular work among ministers and Members of Parliament and have the potential to become highly-politicised (see Melissen 2011 for a discussion of ‘consular diplomacy’).

**Responding to intermittent events**

Large-scale consular emergencies occur infrequently. It can be months or years between major incidents. Yet in the interim the way that people travel continues to evolve. Due to the lower cost and greater ease of travel, individuals can travel more spontaneously and with less preparation. Reflected in foreign ministry information campaigns, such as the British ‘Know Before You Go’ campaign, many individuals do not check travel advisories and will travel without appropriate insurance. Shifts in travelling behaviour change the nature of the risks encountered (see further, ‘t Hart, Heyse and Boin 2001, p. 182) and the demands on the consular assistance function continue to evolve.

Given the culture of rotating positions and postings every few years, one of the potential problems for foreign ministries in the interim between major emergencies, is a loss of expertise in large-scale consular response (see Moynihan 2008, p. 351, for barriers to effective learning during crisis). In public sector crisis management, reforms and lessons learned are in part based on experiences acquired in previous emergencies (see Stern 1997 for discussion of experience-based learning). A loss of detailed and specific, strategic and operational knowledge and experience in relation to responding to consular emergencies is potentially lost with the regular rotation of personnel. This is problematic as first-hand experience in consular emergency response includes practical operational details that facilitate a smoother on the ground operation in a foreign country. For instance, potential problems with equipment such as satellite phones or mobile phone batteries, preference for and availability of particular foreign currencies, and cultural nuances of managing a response
operation in a foreign country's disaster or conflict zone (UD 1, 4 June).

Conversely, a consequence of the rotation of foreign ministry personnel through a variety of positions is that they are likely to, at some point, be exposed to consular work, either at the headquarters or at an embassy or consulate abroad. In each of the three foreign ministries studied, this created a cadre of individuals with consular experience who were versed in consular sensitive issues and could be called upon in subsequent large-scale responses. Task forces, such as a rapid deployment team, can collectively have experience from a number of previous disasters. Response teams in the evacuations from Lebanon included individuals with experience in responding to the tsunami and to the Bali bombings. There will inevitably be periods in which foreign ministries' emergency response crisis function will not be activated or will only activate for small emergencies. However, there is a risk that without proper training and knowledge-transfer, response capacity will decrease, especially if there is no major emergency to provide on-the-job training.

**Institutions for large-scale response**

Despite the scale of disasters and conflicts that prompt large-scale consular responses, it can be difficult for foreign ministries to establish the true proportions of an event in its early stages. It is not immediately obvious just how far foreign ministries will need to go beyond normal routines. In general, consular sections have a significant and constant workload throughout the year, dealing with new and ongoing individual consular cases, delivering public information campaigns, and routine preparedness and training that also encompasses consular work. If an organisation is 'not designed to look for trouble' then sense making can be hindered when emergencies occur (Boin et al. 2005, pp. 20-21). To increase preparedness and to train for large-scale events, the foreign ministries studied in this dissertation instituted designated consular crisis groups and positions with crisis management responsibilities as part of the consular services section at the headquarters. When no emergency is in progress, these individuals plan, prepare and train foreign ministry personnel for emergencies, but also remain alert to incidents around the world that may escalate into major consular events.

Embassies and other posts abroad make up another important part of the early warning system for these intermittent events and are inevitably closer to developments as they unfold. However, consular assistance is just one of the
many functions an embassy or consulate will serve. The primary purpose of most posts is to promote national interests abroad and monitor and report back on issues of national interest. Furthermore, these posts are often located in major cities or even in neighbouring countries. Depending on the locality of the emergency, posts may be no better at comprehending the beginnings of a large-scale consular emergency than the foreign ministry on the other side of the world. Embassies are also useful resources at the beginning of consular emergencies, as personnel working in the region are well placed to understand the unique context of the country in which the disaster is situated, and may have developed local networks that can facilitate a more effective response.

Putting embassy advice into a broader network context and acting as an information hub is another undertaking in which consular services sections are particularly useful. Especially during the tsunami response and evacuations from Lebanon, each foreign ministry had a number of different embassies and on the ground teams involved in the large-scale consular emergency response. However, posts and teams were often too busy managing the on the ground minutia of the response, and their capacity to communicate information effectively between embassies or other teams on the ground was reduced. The consular section of the foreign ministry provided, in theory though not always in practice, a natural coordination hub for posts and also for the whole-of-government response.

*Providing collective and individual assistance: A numbers game*

In large-scale consular responses, determining how many citizens are affected and how many of these citizens are likely to utilise consular assistance is a challenge for foreign ministries. The difficulty of this was illustrated during the Swedish evacuations from Lebanon when SMS messages were sent out to all Swedish mobile numbers in the region with the time and place of an embarkation point for evacuation. This communication tool allowed the Swedish foreign ministry to direct messages to Swedish citizens, including ones that had not already been in contact with the foreign ministry. However, it was not possible to predict how many of those who received the text message would make use of the information and arrive at the embarkation point (UD 1, 4 June; UD 2, 21 May). Whether broadcasting or 'narrowcasting', this is an issue with one-way communication. Furthermore, it is also not possible for foreign ministries to predict how actions of the families and friends of citizens
in distress will increase the already sizeable consular caseload for responders. For example, during the British tsunami response, when families or friends in the UK became frustrated with what they felt was inadequate information or assistance, some flew to the disaster zone to locate or assist their relatives or friends. However, the on-the-ground caseload for an already small number of government officials was increased when these citizens arrived unprepared (NAO and Zito Trust 2006, pp. 37-38). Numbers matter in a large-scale consular response, and for every citizen in distress or potentially under threat abroad, there may be numerous family or friends who will engage with the foreign ministry, either through call centres or on-the-ground in the disaster zone.

In the large-scale consular responses studied in this dissertation, the majority of individuals in need required minimal individual attention and could be dealt with as a large grouping. For instance, many individual simply sought out advice or a seat on evacuation transport. But within those hundreds or thousands, there were more complex or sensitive individual consular cases involving for example, death or severe injury or administrative questions regarding visas. Large-scale consular emergencies generate a collective risk to citizens and produce collective consular needs. Simultaneously, a multitude of more complex individual cases require extra attention. Foreign ministries continue to manage these individual consular cases long after the collective crisis has ended.

Within a large-scale consular emergency, significantly different consular response challenges may be created and require separate simultaneous operations. The Australian and British experience of the evacuations from Lebanon is an example of this. The challenge in mid-2006 when Beirut was being bombarded was primarily the logistics of moving thousands of individuals and families. However, at the same time the security situation was far worse in southern Lebanon where a small number of foreign nationals were trapped close to the border, at much greater risk of harm. The operation to extricate this small number of individuals was more complex and risky than the mass evacuations from Beirut (DFAT 1, 11 March; FCO 3, 18 April). Large-scale consular emergency responses require a combination of strategies with sufficient personnel to manage both the large number of citizens involved in broad logistical operations, and also to give due care to the more difficult (but potentially still numerous) individual cases.
Pragmatism and compassion in a large-scale incident

Large-scale consular emergency response is a massive logistical challenge, especially given the small number of personnel available to cover a large territory or to assist a large number of citizens. However, it is also an exercise in human relations as large-scale consular emergencies produce dangerous or threatening conditions. Providing both pragmatic and compassionate assistance is a challenge of consular response. Not every citizen affected seeks consular assistance and not everyone seeking consular assistance is traumatised or feels threatened. Nonetheless, responders need to be aware that citizens potentially face very distressing conditions. For instance, following the tsunami, some of the individuals seeking assistance had lost all their possessions including passports and documents, had lost family and were surrounded by death and destruction. Some individuals required significant medical attention and others were in various states of bereavement. These individuals could not be treated the same as those simply seeking advice or administrative assistance.

Responders need to be compassionate to the situation faced by citizens, but given the numbers, it is also necessary for responders be pragmatic and assist as many individuals and families as possible (see NAO and Zito Trust 2006 for the experiences of British nationals affected by the tsunami). This need for a balance of pragmatism and compassion was particularly evident in call centres. Information needed to be gathered from large numbers of concerned individuals who were overloading the call centre capacity (see further, Scanlon 2007). This is one of the reasons why it is preferable for call handlers to have consular training or prior experience of working within the legal and privacy constraints of consular assistance (UD 2, 21 May). Major logistical operations are a central part of large-scale consular response. But these operations also involve individuals in an uncertain, urgent, and threat filled environment that may require both pragmatic and compassionate assistance.

4. Large-scale consular emergency response: An evolving challenge

Response precedents and institutionalisation

The more that governments engage in large-scale crisis management to assist their citizens outside the national territory, the more that these responses become ingrained in the government crisis management function. Once
exceptional measures, such as compensation packages and evacuation flights, then become the norm and it is difficult to regress in terms of provision of services. This process is two-fold. Among the citizenry, the responses set precedents in terms of expectations and entitlements. Within the foreign ministry, there is a process of institutionalisation through organisational learning and network building.

Consular work involves different concerns, challenges and priorities to other foreign ministry work. Consequently, consular service sections often have more in common with the consular sections of other foreign ministries. There are regular meetings of representatives from different consular services sections, such as the European Union grouping or the consular ‘colloque’ of Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the US and Canada. Through this networking, different foreign ministries’ consular services sections can become aware of or confirm changes and trends in the interaction with citizens. This networking also familiarises key decision-makers in consular services with each other, which can facilitate strategic and operational coordination and cooperation when an emergency occurs (see Moynihan 2008, p. 357). Foreign ministries can learn from each other’s response strategies – preventative strategies such as information campaigns, and response strategies, such as the use of new technologies or procedures (FCO 3, 2 June). Furthermore, as consular policies and laws are refined by one government, other governments are pressured to remain forward thinking in the consular realm.

**Wellbeing of foreign ministry personnel**

Large-scale consular emergencies produce a situation that has the potential to be highly stressful for responding personnel, particular for those on the ground in a hazardous environment and face-to-face with distressed citizens. In emergencies such as the evacuations from Lebanon, a small number of personnel on the ground may be tasked with managing crowds of hundreds of individuals. Furthermore, some foreign ministry personnel, already posted in the region, may know individuals affected by the disaster. The trauma faced by personnel may originate from the same conditions that citizens are facing, but may also be initiated or intensified by criticism of the response. In the environment of a large-scale consular response it is easy for citizens who do not feel that they or their family have received an adequate level of assistance to draw attention to this deficiency through the mass media. Compounding this
problem, media outlets are drawn to the incidents and reporters are often able to arrive on the scene before government officials.

As responders on-the-ground and in call centres are unable to provide personalised attention to each of the large numbers of individuals and families needing assistance, they can become easy targets for potentially distressing or stressful face-to-face and media criticism. Furthermore, during an emergency response, personnel rotation is necessary to mitigate fatigue. However, in large-scale emergency responses there is not sufficient staff to rotate effectively. This is even more of an issue in emergencies that occur during a holiday period, such as the 2004 tsunami which struck the day after Christmas. In large-scale emergencies, back up personnel may be used immediately to reinforce the response. For instance, due to the scale of the tsunami emergency, the UK's back up Rapid Deployment Team was utilised as a second team. Consequently, back up personnel were not available to relieve the initial rapid deployment personnel (FCO 1, 21 May).

Organisational learning

The learning phase of large-scale consular emergency response was outside the scope of this dissertation. However, learning from previous emergency responses and from other countries' experiences did appear to influence the responses to subsequent emergencies (see Boin et al. 2005, pp. 115-36, for a discussion of crisis and learning). For instance, Australia's largest consular response at the time of the tsunami had been the Bali bombings two years prior. Key individuals in the tsunami response named the exposure to large-scale emergency response within the Australian government during the Bali bombings response in 2002 as a factor contributing to the speed and cohesiveness of the tsunami response (see for example, Shergold 2005, p. 48; Paterson 2006, p. 5). The Bali bombings response was said to have established and reinforced a number of procedures, such as the rapid convening of the Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force to facilitate a whole-of-government response. The experience reportedly ingrained for the public service agencies the extent to which foreign disasters could involve a large domestic government component (see further, Paul 2005).

Sweden's largest recent consular emergency at the time of the tsunami was also the Bali bombing response, which was a relatively smaller emergency for Sweden than for Australia. When the tsunami struck, the necessary
institutional architecture for a whole-of-government consular emergency response had not been established or practised (see SOU 2005). The tsunami was a wake-up call for many foreign ministries. The event led to a realisation for many that governments needed to adapt to changes in the way citizens travel (see for example, NAO 2005, pp. 14-19). The reforms that the Swedish government and foreign ministry brought about following the tsunami had not been fully implemented by the time the conflict in Lebanon escalated. Nonetheless, the political and administrative facets of government were alert to the potential consequences of a large-scale consular emergency and this contributed to a more proactive response (MFA Sweden 2006).

**Technological innovation and response capacity**

As already noted, the largest consular emergencies may occur months or years apart and between large-scale emergencies the way citizens travel can change. In terms of response capacity, during the interim there is the potential evolution of technology, for example, mobile or telecommunication technology. In some ways this can enhance the response whilst in other ways it can make the response more challenging. For the responders, technological innovation can provide new opportunities for enhanced response tools, such as the use of SMS technology, social networking, or improvements in database management, and information collection and dissemination. Near instant news transfer across the globe can also facilitate faster sense-making. Improvements in technology can facilitate more effective communication between citizens and the foreign ministry with the ability to target messages and broadcast messages further and faster. Technological innovations can also reduce the demand for consular assistance by giving citizens the tools to remove themselves from the emergency situation or provide citizens ready access to additional information without assistance from the foreign ministry.

Technological innovation also creates new dynamics with citizens who are utilising this rapidly evolving technology. Improvements in information technology and the proliferation of personal telecommunication devices, such as smartphones, have changed the collection and dissemination of news by media companies. For example, news websites such as the BBC engage directly with the public and request that citizens affected by a disaster tell their story or share their photos and footage of an incident. An implication of these
changes is that citizens can easily and publicly criticise the government response or compare the content and speed of their government’s response with another government’s response. Furthermore, the ability of citizens to rapidly access information has the potential to raise expectations of how knowledgeable consular officials should be about the event. It is important to learn from previous experiences in large-scale emergencies. However, given the rapid changes in technology, the process of adaptation has to be ongoing between crises and as part of the preparedness process.

**Unintended consequences of response technology**

Utilisation of communication technology, for instance mobile phones, or social networking tools such as Facebook or Twitter, is now an option to communicate with the public. However, both intended and unintended consequences result from the incorporation of new technologies and tools into crisis management. First of all, incorporating new technologies into the arsenal for consular emergency response can take significant preparation. For example, the use of SMS technology to text message all phones in the disaster or conflict zone that are registered in a particular country is not a technology that could be organised at the beginning of an emergency response. Making this a usable response technology requires establishing dialogue with major national telecommunication providers well ahead of a major emergency.

The use of text messaging and the inability to know how many citizens will utilise this information was noted earlier in this chapter. Another issue with this ‘short message’ technology is that these messages lack detail, which can lead to further confusion and create further work for consular personnel. For instance, during the Swedish evacuations from Lebanon when a text message was sent, it was sent to all Swedish mobile phones in the region. Citizens located in various parts of the region or already in the process of evacuation (for example, already on ships to Cyprus) also received messages regarding meeting point and embarkation instructions in Beirut. The text messages resulted in an increase in enquiries and requests for clarification from citizens to the surrounding posts and the consular services section (UD 2, 21 May). Furthermore, when personnel had not been fully briefed on the plans associated with the text messages this also exacerbated coordination issues (UD 3, 1 June). Technological innovation will continue to become part of
consular emergency responses, but each new technology or new use of existing technology also requires an understanding of a human response to the technology.

5. Future directions for consular emergency research and practice

Priorities for future research

There is a broad and rich scope for future research into large-scale consular emergency response. For the benefit of both practitioners and scholars of crisis management, a potentially valuable area for future research lies in examining how lessons are learned and 'best practices' are implemented between these infrequent but potentially high-impact responses. Given that governments will continue to engage in large-scale consular emergency response, it is worth understanding the extent to which lessons are developed from the previous experiences of the government or from other governments' experiences. Examining the subject of intra-crisis and inter-crisis organisational learning would be beneficial in the context of large-scale consular emergency management given the high rotation of personnel in the foreign ministry. Because the way citizens travel shifts and changes and foreign ministries' response tools are constantly evolving, it is pertinent to understand the learning and reform process that occurred between these large-scale events.

In relation to a more conceptual study of the phenomena, an underlying theme running through this project has been the relationship between the state and the citizen. A closer examination of this relationship during large-scale consular emergency response has the potential to reveal much about a modern concept of citizenship, both during times of crisis and when citizens are outside the national territory. A greater understanding of how a government's domestic crisis management function is related to its consular crisis management function would be beneficial to further elucidate underlying assumptions regarding the state-citizen relationships on the part of the political and bureaucratic leadership and the citizenry. It would be valuable to compare the various facets of the response to a domestic event. For example, comparing the British response to the 2005 London bombings, with a response to a foreign consular event, such as the British response to the 2005 attack in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.
To better understand the relationships between the government and citizens outside the borders of the state, there is scope for future research to focus on the different facets of ‘remote’ and ‘distance’ in consular response. For example, the practical implications of these facets in relation to the challenges consular officials are likely to face and what support they need in order to respond to these events abroad. Large-scale consular emergency response is also connected to issues of dual-nationality and to integration challenges within the European Union. The issue of managing large-scale consular emergencies is likely to be an important component of further developments in the European consular system and European ‘protection policy space’ (see Boin, Ekengren and Rhinard 2006; Boin and Rhinard 2008). A further and more in depth exploration of the compatriotism and national identity components of citizens’ expectations would prove valuable. For example, with further integration of European consular assistance there is the potential to examine the extent to which government officials provide comparable levels of assistance to all EU citizens; and further, how examples of preferential and non-preferential treatment have been received by the media and public opinion.

From a practitioner standpoint, an area ripe for examination is the ability of governments to respond to simultaneous consular emergencies. Although a detailed examination of this response capacity issue was outside the specific scope of this dissertation, this issue was noted as a concern by interviewees. The concern was that there was insufficient response capacity to manage parallel or simultaneous major disasters in different parts of the world. Foreign ministries have already experienced smaller scale simultaneous emergencies. For example, in November 2008 the Mumbai terrorist attacks coincided with the Bangkok airport shut down; and in early 2011, unrest in the Middle East and North Africa coincided with a major earthquake in New Zealand followed shortly by an earthquake, tsunami and damage to a nuclear reactor in Japan.

The consular section of the foreign ministry does not need to be very large to deal with day-to-day consular cases. Yet major emergencies not only take up the entire capacity for consular response, but also draw in other foreign ministry and government resources as well. Large-scale consular emergency response diverts attention from other more routine consular assistance cases and it is a challenge for the foreign ministry to maintain continuity of a government department while also maintaining a major-response capacity. In
relation to this, it would also be pertinent to examine: (a) how other areas of national government and local government contribute to the longer term consular response, i.e. the support provided to those affected by consular emergencies; and (b) how the consular emergency response affects and is affected by other facets of a government’s responses to a foreign disaster, for example the positive and negative implications for foreign relations or humanitarian aid.

Concluding reflections

Large-scale consular emergencies threaten the physical and mental wellbeing of citizens abroad. The consular nature of this class of emergency presents myriad strategic and operational challenges for governments. Many citizens caught up in disasters abroad find themselves without their usual support networks, and seek assistance to navigate an unfamiliar society and administrative system. Governments are perceived by (often vocal) sections of society, such as victims’ friends and family, and the news media, to have a role or responsibility to intervene and provide assistance to citizens in distress abroad. Despite vigorous information campaigns by the foreign ministries to promote personal responsibility while travelling, this perception is unlikely to change in the near future. The need for large-scale consular emergency response is one of the consequences of changes to global tourism and the semi-permanent attachment of expatriates to their home country. In addressing the overall research question of how governments have responded to large-scale consular emergencies and how these responses can be understood and evaluated, this dissertation has examined how large-scale consular emergencies have impacted on government crisis arrangements. Furthermore, this dissertation has drawn attention to the foreign component of the generally domestic crisis management function of government, which includes questions of sovereignty and citizenship and a greater degree of cross-cultural issues and foreign relations.

The response capacity of governments is impeded by the international context in which the crisis responses take place. Government responses have to contend simultaneously with the logistics and sentiment associated with citizenship and national identification. The scale of the emergency (either in the numbers requiring assistance or the geographic dispersal of the need for assistance) and the focus on national citizens in an international environment
is a catalyst for many of the strategic and operational challenges faced by crisis managers. A large-scale response needs to incorporate both pragmatism and compassion. It is also necessary for consular assistance to adapt to changing travel patterns and technological innovation, and for crisis managers to understand that during a consular emergency response, a logistically efficient response should also engage with issues of national identity and citizenship.

More people are travelling and disasters or threats abroad have the potential to affect a large number of foreign nationals. It is difficult to predict where or when the next major disaster will strike and whether a significant number of individuals from a particular country will be involved. The large-scale nature of these incidents challenges foreign ministries’ long-established role of assisting individuals in need abroad. The consular nature of these events extends, outside the national territory, governments’ established role of responding to large-scale incidents affecting citizens. Consular emergencies engage and challenge notions of societal dependence on government and raise questions regarding the personal and individual responsibility of citizens, and the legal and moral responsibility of the state. Consular emergency responses test the limits of bureaucratic reach, highlight the relationship between the citizen and the state, and engage the political sphere with questions of how far a government should go to assist citizens. The underlying commonalities in the consular component of the responses during these diverse events point to a class of emergency that foreign ministries need to continue to strive to understand and prepare for. For these reasons, it is important for practitioners involved in consular assistance and scholars of public administration and crisis management to understand how governments, and in particular foreign ministries, respond to large-scale consular emergencies.
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